3 G.S. Khaparde's Second and Longest Stay in Shirdi
From 6 December 1911 to 15 March 1912

In Khaparde's diary, we find references to Sai Baba in a few entries dated January 1911, which offer testimony of his devotion toward the saint. In particular, on 11 January, a month after his first visit to Shirdi, he wrote:

> Yesterday, Asnare, Palekar, Brahma Ganorkar and others went on a tour to visit Shirdi, Kedgaon, Poona, Alandi and, if time permits, Bombay. This would be rather a full programme. I sent two coconuts and three rupees with Palekar[1] as a present to Sayin Maharaj of Shirdi and for incidental expenses of fruits, etc.[2]

Interestingly, on this day he had to accommodate himself in the upper hall of his house, since on account of the Islāmic festival of Muharram,[3] "my usual office was full of Muharram Fakirs and Fakirnis and Gopalrao Dorle, with Godbole and Durrani, sat there praying them", which is another indication of Khaparde's hospitality and spiritual openness.

Another noteworthy feature of Khaparde's religious life during the months following his first visit to Shirdi was his practice of holding religious 'classes' at his home in Amravati. His diary shows that throughout 1911 he held such gatherings with friends, reading and discussing religious texts. During September, October, and November, these classes had become an

1 Also known as Baba Palekar. A junior advocate who worked with Khaparde.

2 National Archives of India, New Delhi, *Diaries of G.S. Khaparde,* 11 January 1911, Microfilm Repository. Identifier: MF_222400056290.

3 The first month of the Muslim calendar. On its tenth day, known as Ashura, Muslims commemorate the death of Prophet Mohammad's grandson, Husayn ibn 'Alī, who was martyred during the battle of Karbala.

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almost daily feature of his domestic routine – Fridays generally excepted – to the point that he occasionally noted when there was "no class". *Kīrtan*s and *bhajan*s likewise formed part of this intensely religious pattern of domestic life.[4] Whether this regular practice predated Khaparde's first visit to Shirdi in December 1910 cannot be established. His earlier diaries nevertheless make clear that religious reading, *kīrtan*s, and discussions of spiritual subjects had long formed part of his life and of his interaction with friends. The classes documented from early 1911 should therefore be understood against the background of an already well-established religious disposition, although the possibility that his first experience of Shirdi encouraged their more systematic organization cannot be excluded.

Further evidence of the intensity of Khaparde's religious life during this period is provided by his encounters, between 12 and 19 November 1911, with Narayan Maharaj (1885-1945) of Kedgaon, a celebrated saint associated with the Dattātreya tradition. Khaparde repeatedly records having his *darśan* and receiving his blessings and was evidently deeply gratified by the particular attention shown to him. Narayan Maharaj called him to his side and allowed him to sit near him; on another occasion, he presented both Khaparde and his son with garlands – something the diarist himself described as "a great honor" – and personally gave Khaparde *prasād* with his own hands. These repeated marks of favor clearly made a strong impression on Khaparde and further illustrate his attraction to revered spiritual figures in the period immediately preceding his return to Shirdi.[5]

On 17 January, he writes about his conversation with Palekar, who had just returned from his pilgrimage:

> He visited Shirdi and *made my presents to Sayin Maharaj. The latter accepted them. In the course of conversation* [*with Sayin Maharaj*], ***he*** [= Sayin Maharaj] ***remarked that he had not asked for sugarcanes for the last one thousand years and now that he did so, only three were brought to him. What could he do with them?*** *He permitted Palekar and his companions to go away at once, saying they could see God in a few days.*[6]

This is a remarkable entry since it reports the precious words of Sai Baba to Palekar: even if Khaparde was not himself present in Shirdi and did not hear these words with his own ears, it should be regarded as a valuable addition to his *Shirdi Diary*. This saying of the *faqīr* is in itself an allegory,

4 See, for example, National Archives of India, New Delhi, *Diaries of G.S. Khaparde*, 31 January, 1 February, 21 April, 19 June, 25 September, 1 October 1911, and *passim* for September-November 1911, Microfilm Repository, Identifier: MF_222400056290. The entries of 25 September and 1 October are particularly indicative of the regularity of these gatherings, since on both occasions Khaparde expressly noted that there was "no class". No comparable reference to such classes has thus far been identified in the diary material examined for the period preceding his first visit to Shirdi in December 1910. This absence, however, cannot be regarded as conclusive, particularly given Khaparde's frequent travels and the irregularity of his domestic routine during those years.

5 See National Archives of India, New Delhi, *Diaries of G.S. Khaparde*, 12-19 November 1911, Microfilm Repository, Identifier: MF_222400056290.

6 National Archives of India, New Delhi, *Diaries of G.S. Khaparde*, 17 January 1911, Microfilm Repository. Identifier: MF_222400056290.

a small parable. It also contains an autobiographic detail, i.e., the saint's continued presence in Shirdi during countless past lives.

The fact that Sai Baba accepted Khaparde's presents is important since it means that he was pleased with his offerings. The saint's words that he "had not asked for sugarcanes for the last one thousand years" are an allusion to the village of Shirdi, it being located in the heart of Maharashtra's sugarcane belt. The term *śirḍī* itself, possibly derived from *śīrā*, 'syrup'/'molasses', is said to mean 'sugarcane'.[7] The implied meaning of the *faqīr*'s utterance is that although he has been living in Shirdi for the last one thousand years – his connection with the village extending through innumerable lives, as he often claimed – he never asked anyone for sugarcane, which is symbolical for the sweetness of the people's devotion (*bhakti*). But now that in this present life he explicitly asks for it, neither the villagers nor the visitors that flock to him bring him any.

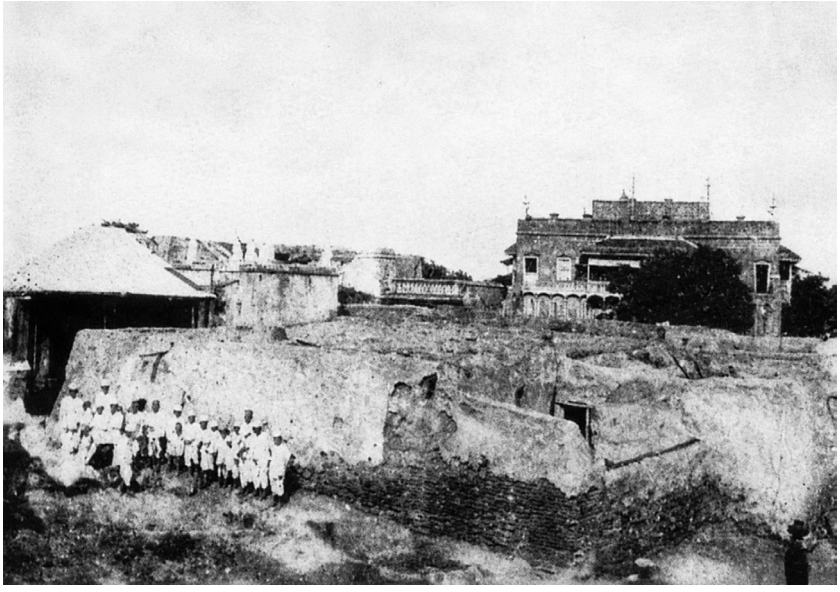

Figure 18 The old village of Shirdi. The area where the Samādhi Mandir was later built

The idea is that Sai Baba longs to receive the nectar of his devotees' *bhakti* so as to reciprocate it in a communion of love. He often lamented that true *bhakta*s were rare since few came to him with a heart filled with love, without worldly expectations. His remark that "only three sugarcanes had been brought to him" is indicative of the scarsity of sugar, i.e., of the devotion that is offered to him. Therefore, "what can he do with them?" In other words, how can he possibly extract a satisfactory amount of sugar from only three sugarcanes?[8] Though a little is better than nothing, and as Jesus taught in *Matthew* 18:20 "where two or three have met together in my name, I am

7 See Bharucha, *Sai Baba of Shirdi*, 2 fn.

8 From the total weight of a sugarcane, only about 10% can be converted into sugar. The yield is somewhere from 50 to 150 grams per sugarcane.

there among them",[9] still this low number of sugarcanes is disappointing, like a spoonful of water from an ocean. This is even more paradoxical given that Shirdi, as noted, is located in Maharashtra's sugarcane belt.

What is implicitly suggested is that Sai Baba is the quintessential embodiment of sweetness – that is, of divine love: the sweetness of all sugarcane is understood to be concentrated in him.[10] Consequently, the *faqīr* laments the fact that the vast majority of those who seek him out are unreceptive; they beg for mundane favors and hope to please him with material gifts, whereas for the master, only the purity of one's heart truly counts.[11] Most are incapable of offering genuine devotion, as their hearts are too hard and dry to receive the love he wishes to shower upon them – a love that forms the true essence of his treasure.[12]

The fact that the saint permitted Palekar and his party "to go away at once saying they could see God in a few days", was his way of blessing them. It meant that they would soon have the *darśan* of their "chosen deity" (*iṣṭadevatā*) in the several pilgrimage places that they planned to visit after leaving Shirdi.

Noteworthy is a final comment that Khaparde makes at the end of his entry:

> I told them [= various friends of his] about Babasaheb Sahasrabuddhe's conviction 'in spite of himself' as he says. He wrote to my son Baba and sent the letter with Baba Palekar who delivered it this morning. Sayin Maharaj won as he was bound to do. The case is wonderful as Babasaheb Sahasrabuddhe is a tough customer.[13]

Here we learn that Sai Baba forced Babasaheb Sahasrabuddhe to stay on in Shirdi, against his own will. The fact that the saint "won as he was bound to do", i.e., succeeded in not allowing him to leave despite he being "a tough customer", reinforced the devotees' conviction that the *faqīr*'s will was supreme. Khaparde was quite amused at what had happened to his friend, and this is ironic given that a year later it would have been his turn to undergo 'detention' in Shirdi for more than three months.

Khaparde was not the only one to be kept under surveillance by the British. Even Sai Baba was being monitored by the Criminal Investigation Department since he attracted to himself thousands of individuals every year, among whom were civil servants and government officials.[14] In a Weekly Intelligence Report of the Director of Criminal Intelligence dated 17 January 1911, we find this most interesting account:

9 *The New English Bible: New Testament*, 34.

10 On divine embodiment, see Waghorne, Cutler, *Gods of Flesh, Gods of Stone*.

11 As we read in *Psalm* 24:3-4: "Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not trust in an idol or swear by a false god"; `https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm%2024&version=NIV`.

12 As Shri Narayan Ashram told Narasimhaswami in September 1936: "Sai Baba had different ways of dealing with different people. He was the centre and to each man he darted a separate radius. Most cared for external things only and hardly any came to him for the highest spiritual benefit of *Atma Nishta* [= 'faith in the Self']" (Narasimhaswami, *Devotees' Experiences*, 63).

13 National Archives of India. New Delhi, *Diaries of G.S. Khaparde*, 17 January 1911, Microfilm Repository. Identifier: MF_222400056290.

14 See Satpathy, *An Inspiring Life*, 22-3. Detectives positioned themselves in proximity to Sai Baba at the mosque, and listened carefully to his conversations with devotees.

Ahmednagar. Shortly after his return from England, G.S. Khaparde of Amraoti went with his son Balkrishna to visit a *fakir*, said to be a Mahomedan, at Shirdi in the Kopargaon Taluka of this district; he arrived on 5th December 1910, and bowed himself before him thrice a day for a week. The *fakir* is an old man of about 70 who came to Shirdi some 30 or 35 years ago and put up in the village mosque where he has resided since. For a long time, he was regarded as an ordinary *fakir*, but in the last 15 years he has acquired a great reputation for sanctity, and goes by the name of Sai Baba. He is described as a *Sadhu*, is said by some to be an *Avatar*, has little following among Mahomedans, practices none of the devotions, etc., of their faith,[15] but is supported by many more or less distinguished Brahmans such as the Honourable Mr. Hari Sitaram Dikshit, Mr. Chandorkar (Deputy Collector and formerly Mamlatdar of Kopargaon) and many others. One Mamlatdar named Bhate, formerly in Khandesh, was so devoted to Sai Baba that he resigned his post and now lives at Shirdi as a kind of devotee.

So far as can be ascertained, it appears that the *fakir* is approached on purely religious grounds, and it is not easy to account for Khaparde's visit, but the following explanation is suggested. It was reported in August last that before Khaparde left for England a secret meeting was held at his home at Amraoti at which astrologers of repute were requested to forecast the future of Maharashtra. The astrologers prophesied that by 1916 the present agitation would assume a tangible shape, and would go on increasing till 1920 by which time there would be actual recourse to arms, and by 1925 the British would have to leave the country. The forte of the Sai Baba of Shirdi is apparently to foretell the future, and Khaparde may have visited him in connection with this, possibly as a believer, but more probably, appreciating the effect of such prophecies on the minds of the people, in order to inspire the oracle.[16]

15 Though the Muslims were a minority, still several of them visited Sai Baba and were devoted to him, first and foremost his servant Abdul Baba. On Abdul Baba and his intriguing Urdu notebook, see Shepherd, *Biographical Investigation*, 15-17, 123-5; Warren, *Unravelling the Enigma*, 261-333. See also Narasimhaswami, *Devotees' Experiences*, 152-7. Moreover, we know that Sai Baba practiced Islāmic rites on occasions.

16 Satpathy, *New Findings*, 64. For an evaluation, see *ibid*., 65-9. Noteworthy is a similar report dated 16 July 1912, in which the death of Sai Baba is erroneously given: "*Ahmednagar*. The death last month is reported of Sain Baba, a well-known old *fakir* of the village of Shirdi, in the Kopargaon Taluka of this district. For many years he was regarded simply as a mad old beggar, but he was taken up by a Brahmin, named Chandorkar, and gradually acquired a great reputation for sanctity, especially amongst the Brahmins although himself originally a Muhammadan. Amongst his followers were several notorious extremists, one of whom, G.S. Khaparde of Amraoti, went to visit the *fakir* shortly after his return from England. It was difficult to see what attraction this ignorant old Muhammadan had for his educated and intelligent Brahmin disciples, and there were strong reasons to believe that the latter were exploiting him for seditious ends by obtaining from him and spreading in the Maharashtra oracular forecasts of the downfall of British rule in India" (*ibid*., 60). In a subsequent report of August 1912, the wrong information of Sai Baba's death was rectified: "The report of the death of Sain Baba … the old Musalman *fakir* who numbers among his disciples many Brahmins and not a few leading extremists, appears to be incorrect; the man who died was a Musalman priest of the same neighbourhood named Saiba. Those disciples of Sain Baba, who live at his place and manage his affairs, are said to be of very low class, using him merely as a means of making money on which they live in idleness and vice" (*ibid*., 61). On the representation of *faqīr*s in the British colonial era, see Siebenga, "Colonial India's 'Fanatical Fakirs'", 445-66.

Contrary to the conjectures here suggested, however, there is no evidence that Sai Baba ever involved himself in politics nor that he ever encouraged any kind of political activism.[17] He never put forward predictions or 'oracles' on the political future of Maharashtra or India. And Khaparde, for his part, never posed questions of this kind to the saint.

Coming back to Khaparde's diary, on 21 January 1911, he writes: "We [= he and his friends V.K. Kale and R.P. Karandikar] sat talking after he[18] went about Sayin Maharaj of Shirdi till about 8:30 PM", which is one more indication of how important Sai Baba was to him.

Economically, 1911 was not a good year for Khaparde. On 14 January, he wrote in his diary that one Mr. Bhide, a sub-inspector, was "taking down the names of all clients that engage me. He questions people for the purpose and has access to Court records. This, it is said, is intended to frighten people and prevent them from engaging me".[19] If in September 1911 he was able to send some money to Bipin Chandra Pal,[20] yet Khaparde's financial situation was no longer as prosperous as it had once been.

Politically, the situation in the course of 1911 continued to deteriorate. With Tilak in prison, his supporters could not do much, and for all Nationalists, Tilak's release was the first prerequisite to Congress reunification. On 27 February 1911, when speaking to Mr. Charles R. Cleveland, head of the Criminal Investigation Department, Khaparde – in the presence of his sons Balkrishna and Balvant – could only report how all his attempts to free his leader had proven useless and that he had "failed to accomplish anything".[21]

When, in the summer of 1911, Bhupendra Nath Bose (1859-1924) appealed to some influential English friends in London, proposing that Tilak, if released, should promise not to re-enter political life for the next three years, Tilak's foremost supporter in Bengal, Motilal Ghose (1847-1922), urged Khaparde to accept the proposal. Khaparde agreed with Ghose, responding on 5 July 1911 that "there would be no difficulty in persuading Mr. T. to accept".[22] Even this plan, however, was destined to fail, as in 1912 Lord Crewe-Milnes (1858-1945), Morley's successor as Secretary of State for India, put an end to all hopes by saying that he saw "no sufficient grounds for mitigating the course of justice".[23] Resigned to his fate, Tilak – whose wife, Satyabhamabai, died in early June 1912 – could only turn to the consolation of study.

With their leader behind bars, in 1911 the British government's repression of the Nationalists intensified. This is evidenced by what happened to Bipin Chandra Pal on 7 October 1911: as soon as the steamer on which he was travelling from England arrived in Bombay, he was arrested and charged with sedition. Undoubtedly, Khaparde was on the blacklist for his many attempts to secure Tilak's release, and his arrest also seemed imminent. It is noteworthy that Khaparde's eldest son, Balkrishna, had gone to Shimla to meet the Director of the Criminal Intelligence Department, attempting to

17 See Satpathy, *New Findings*, 222.

18 A *sādhu*, whom Khaparde suspected to be a detective.

19 Kunte, *Source Material*, 390.

20 See Kunte, *Source Material*, 392.

21 Kunte, *Source Material*, 391. Khaparde calls him 'Mr. Cleaveland'.

22 Wolpert, *Tilak and Gokhale*, 259. On Khaparde in Wolpert's seminal study, see *ibid*., 126-7, 178-80, 194, 211, 227-8, 258-9, 266, 275-6, 281, 283, 288-9, 293.

23 Wolpert, *Tilak and Gokhale*, 259.

gather first-hand information about the government's intention. By this time, the activity of detectives and spies monitoring Khaparde's every movement was at its peak, and his future appeared gloomy.

Khaparde made up his mind to leave for Shirdi on the afternoon of Tuesday, 5 December 1911, one year after his first visit to Sai Baba. His wife Lakshmibai and son Balvant were already staying in Shirdi by early November, as apparently was his friend K.J. Bhishma. On 2 November, having learned from Balvant that his wife was unwell, Khaparde advised them to go to Bombay "with the permission of Sayin Maharaj";[24] in any event, they were in Shirdi when he arrived there a month later. Khaparde therefore set out from Amravati accompanied only by a certain Mr. Bandu from Elichpur, taking the Punjab Mail in the late afternoon. He writes that all the way to Kopargaon they had a first-class compartment all to themselves. From there, they hired a *ṭoṅgā* and drove to Shirdi, reaching it the following day soon after daybreak.

> Shirdi, Wednesday 6 December 1911
>
> As my Tonga came near the house newly built by Mr. Dixit, the first person I met was Mr. Madhavrao Deshpande. Before I got out of the Tonga Mr. Dixit asked me to dine with him today. Then I went with Madhavrao to pay respects to Sayin Maharaj and saluted him from a distance. *He was washing hands and feet at the time*. As I got busy washing and praying I could not salute him *when he went out*.
> Later on we went to him in company and sat near him in the Masjid. ***He told a story about having been with a Fakir who was fond of good food. This Fakir was invited to dinner party and went with Sayin Maharaj. At the time of starting, the Fakir's wife asked Sayin Maharaj to bring some food from the feast and gave a pot for the purpose. The Fakir fed so well that he decided to sleep at the place. Sayin Maharaj returned with the food tying the cakes to his back and carrying the liquid in the pot placed on his head. He found the way very long, lost his way, and sat near a Mangwada[25] to rest a while. The dogs began to bark and he got up and returned to his village and made over the cakes and liquid to the Fakir's wife. By that time, the Fakir also returned and they had a very good feed together. He added that it is very difficult to find a good Fakir.***
> Mr. Sathe, who built the Wada in which I lived last year, is here and I saw him first in the Masjid and then at dinner. Mr. Dixit fed a large number. Among them is Mr. Thosar who is the sister's son of the late Madhavrao Govind Ranade.[26] Thosar is employed in the Custom's office in Bombay. He is a very nice man and we sat talking. There is a gentleman from Nasik and

24 National Archives of India, New Delhi, *Diaries of G.S. Khaparde*, 2 November 1911, Microfilm Repository, Identifier: MF_222400056290.

25 A Māṅgs' lodge. The Māṅgs are the lowest of Maharashtra's three chief untouchable castes and a much neglected group. The traditional occupation of Māṅgs is rope making; see Hiwrale, "Mangs in Maharashtra", 39-52.

26 Khaparde seems to be referring to the famous Citpavan Brahmin Mahadev Govind Ranade (1842-1901): he was a judge of the High Court of Bombay, a historian and an influential social and religious reformer. He was also a founding member of the Indian National Congress. In 1931, Mr. Thosar – also spelt Toser – became a renouncer and was known as Shri Narayan Ashram or Swami Narayan; see Shepherd, *Biographical Investigation*, 238-40.

> there are many others. Among them one Tipnis who came with his wife and the latter was brought to bed of a son. Bapusaheb Jog is here and his wife is doing well. Mr. Nulkar is dead and I miss him very much. None of his family is here. Balasaheb Bhate is here and his wife gave birth to a son on Datta Jayanti day. We are staying in Dixit's Wada which is very convenient.

Having just arrived in the village early that morning, Khaparde describes a very informal scene at the mosque, where the saint was busy "washing hands and feet". It should be noted that Sai Baba's right hand was longer than his left, just as his right foot was longer than his left foot. This is the reason why his right sandal (*pādukā*)[27] was slightly longer than the left.[28] Khaparde writes that later he and others "sat near" Sai Baba at the mosque, from which we gather that visitors were privileged to be very close to him. Though the number of devotees was destined to grow considerably, especially during festivals,[29] it was still possible to be in close proximity to the saint and freely interact with him.



Figure 19 Sai Baba preparing to bathe in the mosque

27 Traditional Indian footwear consisting of a sole with a post and knob that is gripped between the big toe and the second toe.

28 See Chitluri, *Baba's Divine Symphony*, 392.

29 With reference to Sai Baba's last years, un undated source reports: "Eager to have their *sadguru*'s *darshan* on *Gurupurnima* day, the devotees flocked to Shirdi. They came from far and near, some did *padyatra* (walking on a pilgrimage). Others came by Tonga, or bullock cart, and yet many others came by rail. Every devotee hoped to receive that special blessing from Baba. Bearing gifts of flowers, garlands, fruits, sweets and shawls they came to the Dwaraka Mai. Some devotees brought books hoping that Baba would sanctify the book with his touch and return it, so that they could read it and benefit from it. Others brought photographs of Baba, hoping to receive the photograph back as *prasad* so that they could worship it. They all rushed to the Dwaraka Mai trying to get Baba's *darshan*. The *sabhamandap* was packed to suffocation with the devotees eager to get into the sanctum sanctorum" (Chitluri, *Baba's Vaani*, 71).

In the tale that Sai Baba narrated, he stands out as the protagonist. He figures as the companion or, most probably, the disciple of another *faqīr*, which could well be a reminiscence of his life as a young ascetic. While the story could be interpreted as being, at least in part, autobiographical, as a whole it appears highly symbolic. Here follows a tentative interpretation. The *faqīr* invited to the dinner party is Sai Baba's master. This *faqīr* is said to be fond of good food, which can be interpreted as a metaphor for spiritual nourishment. That Sai Baba was his disciple is implicitly hinted at by the *faqīr*'s wife's request that he bring back food from the feast, for which purpose she gives him a pot to carry. The dinner party is symbolic of Allāh's banquet: in his grace, the Lord prepares everything for his guests, inviting them to partake of spiritual nourishment and to rejoice in communion and brotherhood with all the saints.[30]

It is noteworthy that *faqīr* literally means 'poor'. The idea is that the Lord invites first and foremost the poor – those who are hungry materially as well as spiritually, i.e., those who hunger and thirst for God. In Sufi mystical imagery, food and especially wine are metaphors for the joy of divine intoxication, the bliss of achieving unity with God. Without hesitation, the *faqīr* accepts the invitation and goes to the sumptuous party, bringing his disciple with him:[31] the *faqīr* feasted so abundantly – that is, he was so filled with divine bliss, given his capacity to assimilate it – that he slept at the place, needing to digest the delicious food served to him. His pupil must have also participated in the dinner party, though he likely partook less sumptuously than his master. In other words, as a good disciple, Sai Baba must have eaten and drunk only what his master allowed him, in accordance with his capacity to assimilate the sustenance of God's grace. Moreover, he needed to remain sober in order to fulfill the wish of his master's wife. Setting an example of how a good disciple should behave – that is, in a spirit of unconditional service (*sevā*) – he is obedient to her request. As soon as the dinner is over, he leaves at night with the heavy, precious load of the banquet's leftovers, which constitute the *prasād* especially intended as a token of God's grace: he ties the cakes (the solid food) to his back and pours the liquid, possibly exquisite wine, into the pot that he carries on his head.

Sai Baba, however, is unable to find his way back since it is now dark and he is alone, without his master; only the master knows the difficult path and can safely lead him home – that is, to his divine source. Weary from the heavy load on his head and shoulders, he decides to rest near a Māṅgs' lodge, a detail that emphasizes his proximity to the lowest of Maharashtra's untouchable castes, as the taboos of pure and impure meant nothing to him.[32] Sai Baba's act of carrying a heavy load of food, his identification with the Māṅgs, and his being surrounded by dogs – animals the Shirdi saint was always fond of – are all elements that recall the popular lore surrounding the god Dattātreya, with

30 On the significance of sharing food in Indian Sufism, see Ali, Hameed, Khan, "Social Role of the Sufis", 282-6. On food in Indian culture, see Pieruccini, Rossi, *A World of Nourishment*.

31 Differently from the guests of Jesus' messianic parable of the great banquet (*Luke* 14:16-24): though invited to a big dinner party with the words "Please come, everything is now ready", they all excuse themselves and don't go, which stirs the anger of the master of the house who then asks his servants to bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame, so that his house may be full. On these issues, see Koet, "Whom Do You Invite to the Table?", 74-92.

32 Sai Baba's proximity to the Māṅgs calls to mind the behavior of the 13th-century Maharashtrian ascetic Guṇḍam Rāūḷ, whose disregard for caste matters was striking; see Feldhaus, *Deeds of God in Ṛddhipur*, 33.

whom Sai Baba was and is identified by Hindus.[33] This deity is said to have once manifested as an outcaste Māṅg carrying a heavy load of meat.[34] It is the barking of the dogs – faithful companions of Dattātreya that, despite their perceived impurity, are said to represent the *Veda*s – that eventually awakens Sai Baba, allowing him to find his way back to his village and hand over the delicious cakes and precious liquid to the *faqīr*'s wife.

Finally, when the *faqīr* himself returns, the meal they share as a reunited family reinforces the imagery of God's kingdom and of the saints' eschatological communion with him, underscoring the superabundance of God's love toward his creatures. Significantly, a blissful banquet both opens and ends the story. Sai Baba's final remark – that it is very difficult to find a good *faqīr*, i.e., a true guide (*pīr*/*guru*) who can lead the disciple to the ultimate goal – is a point he emphatically stressed on several occasions, as he envisioned the teacher as indispensable for any pupil to achieve salvation. This insistence on the need for a *guru* is in keeping with the Dattātreya tradition (the *Dattasampradāya*), in which the deity is revered as the supreme *guru*.

It is noteworthy that the wives of two devotees gave birth while in Shirdi: first, Balasaheb Bhate's wife on the previous day (5 December), which was the festival of *Dattajayantī* (Dattātreya's birthday) – a fact that might explain Sai Baba's allusion to this deity in his tale – and then Mr. Tipnis' wife on this very day. Sadly, however, Balasaheb Bhate's son died a few days later, on 10 December.

> Shirdi, Thursday 7 December 1911
>
> I slept well last night. My son and wife are doing well with Bhishma. Vishnu is also here. We fed a good many people today and I fell into the proper routine of the place. *I saluted Baba Sayin Maharaj as he went out; then after he returned to the Masjid, and again in the evening and later on again, when he went to sleep in the Chavadi*. The Bhajanpujana was a little less, as some fools object to music. After we returned from Shej Arti, Bhishma had his usual Bhajan and Mr. Thosar also sang some verses, a few of his own composition and others of Kabir, Das Ganu and others. Das Ganu's wife, Bayu, who was here last year, is now at her father's house. We sat talking till late at night.
> Bapusaheb Jog told me in the morning that after I went away last year, the Commissioner and the Collector came to see Sayin Maharaj. *He would not let them into the Masjid*. They waited at the Chavadi. *Sayin Maharaj saw them as he went out and looked at them through a sort of a telescope made by*

33 The *Shri Sai Satcharita* is taken to be the modern *Gurucaritra* by many of Sai Baba devotees, i.e., is identified with the mid-16th century 'Bible' of the *Dattasampradāya*, extolling the lives of the first two historical *avatāra*s of Dattātreya, Śrīpād Śrīvallabh (ca. 1323-1353) and Nṛsiṃha Sarasvatī (ca. 1378-1458). An early source reports that the *Gurucaritra* "was Baba's favored book to be read aloud to the assembled devotees"; see Chitluri, *Baba's Divine Symphony*, 147 (*Shri Sai Leela* 17, 1-3, 1940); Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 289 (chap. 18, vv. 56-7). Episodes of Sai Baba's identification with Dattātreya are numerous in devotional literature; see *ibid*., 10-11, 231. With reference to Dattātreya worship, Sai Baba once remarked: "When a holy tutelar deity like Datta was waiting on the way, to give *darshan*, without an effort, will I ever be pleased with the unfortunate one who disregards his *darshan*?"; see Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 638 (chap. 38, v. 146).

34 For this story and its transmission in the Marāṭhī cultural area, see Rigopoulos, *Dattātreya*, 241-56.

> *folding the fingers of his hand*. They wished to speak with him. *He asked them to wait for two hours*. They did not wait, but went leaving ten rupees for *dakshina*. *Sayin Maharaj did not like to keep the money and gave it away*.
> Madhavrao Deshpande told us at night that Dada Kelkar had a nephew by name Babu. *Sayin Maharaj was very kind to him*. This Babu died and *Maharaj remembers him to this day*. Mr. Moreshwar Vishwanath Pradhan, Barrister at Law practicing at Bombay, came to see Sayin Maharaj. On seeing his wife, *Sayin Maharaj said that she was the mother of Babu*. She got in the family way later on, and on the day of her delivery in Bombay, *Sayin Maharaj here said he had pain and that twins would be born and that one of them would die*. So it happened, and when Mrs. Pradhan came here with her young son *Sayin Maharaj took him on his lap and asked if he would come to the place, and the child of two months distinctly answered "Hoon"* [= Yes I am].

The diarist's observation that "we fed a good many people today" implies that he offered a generous lunch to all devotees and friends, a gesture that Sai Baba must have appreciated. Although staying in Shirdi was not at all costly – given that, as in any *ashram*, food and lodging were very inexpensive – Khaparde's act of kindness was meant to foster an atmosphere of spiritual friendship.

Krishnashastri Jageshwar Bhishma (1854-1935) was a Vedic scholar and a *kīrtankār*. His friendship with Khaparde stemmed from their shared involvement in the political struggle for freedom against the British.[35] According to the *Shri Sai Satcharita* (chap. 6, vv. 59-93), it was Bhishma who first had the idea of starting the celebrations of the *Rāmanavamī* festival in Shirdi, with Sai Baba's approval. Moreover, Bhishma was the author of a celebrated *ārtī*[36] book, the *Sri Sainath Sagunopasana*: all in all, of the sixteen *ārtī*s written in the *faqīr*'s praise, nine were composed by him.[37] Khaparde's observation that "the Bhajanpujana (the chanting of devotional hymns at the *śej* or evening *ārtī*) was a little less, as some fools object to music", proves that there were those – likely orthodox Muslims – who objected to the ritual worship offered by Hindus to Sai Baba.

The news that the saint had not allowed entry to the mosque to two high officers such as a Deputy Commissioner and a District Collector is noteworthy albeit not unusual.[38] Evidently, the saint wanted to test them and did not like their ten rupees *dakṣiṇā*, which he had not asked for and which he immediately gave away. Both officers lacked patience, since they left the village not complying with the saint's request to "wait for two hours". Thus, their desire to speak with Sai Baba remained unfulfilled. Of particular interest is the observation that the *faqīr* "looked at them through a sort of a telescope made

35 He was in contact with various other Nationalists, among whom were Munje and Hedgewar, and was also imprisoned for a few days; see Aher, *Shirdi Gazetteer*, 174.

36 The *ārtī* is the Hindu ceremony of circling a tray of lights before a deity or a holy person at the end of worship, while chanting a hymn. On the *ārtī*s and congregational worship, see Shepherd, *Biographical Investigation*, 213-17.

37 It was Khaparde who published the *Sri Sainath Sagunopasana*, at his own expense, till 1922; see Satpathy, *An Inspiring Life*, 265. See also Chitluri, *Baba's Rinanubandh*, 175.

38 The Deputy Commissioner is the executive head of a District; the District Collector is the highest officer of revenue administration in a District.

by folding the fingers of his hand", a symbolic gesture through which he conveyed that he kept an eye on them and looked deep into their minds and hearts. All of the saint's gestures were considered to be as meaningful as his words and silences, as he taught through his entire persona.

The story of young Babu's premature death and of his rebirth as the son of Moreshwar Vishwanath Pradhan, is meant to illustrate the saint's omniscience and power and the peculiar workings of *karma*. The underlying idea is that his devotees have karmic ties with him and are linked to one another, and that it is he who supervises their 'karmic trajectories' birth after birth. Thus, while Pradhan's wife was giving birth in Bombay, Sai Baba, sitting in the mosque at Shirdi, claimed that he himself was bearing her labor pains. He prophesied that she would have twins, but only one – Babu – would survive. When Mrs. Pradhan came to Shirdi with her two-months-old baby, the saint took him on his lap asking him "if he would come to the place", meaning if he would be happy to be reunited with him, and immediately came the child's answer: an emphatic yes.

> Shirdi, Friday 8 December 1911
>
> I forgot to mention yesterday and the day before that Upasani Vaidya that used to be at Amravati is here and saw me soon after my arrival. We sat talking. He told me briefly his story since leaving Amravati, how he went to Gwalior State, how he purchased a village, how it became non-paying, how he met a Mahatma, how he got ill, how he tried all remedies, applied to various Sadhus and Mahatmas, how finally Sayin Maharaj took him in hand, how he improved[39] and is now under orders to stay here. He has composed a *stotra* [= a religious hymn] of Sayin Maharaj in Sanskrit. We all got up early and attended the Kakad Arti.[40] It is very edifying. I prayed, bathed and *saw Sayin Maharaj go out, then again after he returned and once more in the afternoon. Sayin Maharaj, looking at me, said "Ka Sarkar". Then he gave the general advice that I should live as God keeps me and added that a man fond of his family has to bear many things and so on and* ***told the story of a rich man who slaved till evening, cooked for himself and ate a very rough bread, all on account of temporary difficulty***.
> We saw Sayin Maharaj again in the evening and then sat in the verandah of the house built by Dixit. Two gentlemen from Bombay brought a Sitar and playing on it said Bhajan. Mr. Thosar whom I call Hazarat also sang very beautifully and Bhishma had his usual Bhajan. Time passed very pleasantly till midnight. Thosar is a very pleasant companion. I had a long talk with my son Balvant, the Bombay men and others about contemplation, etc. Madhavrao Deshpande was here and fell asleep. I saw with my own eyes

39 During the initial period of his stay in Shirdi, Sai Baba healed his respiratory condition. The saint assured Upasani with the words: "*Yah jagah maraṇ ko nahī, taraṇ ko hai*", i.e., 'This is no place for death but a place for crossing death!'; Narasimhaswami, *Life of Sai Baba*, 2: 249.

40 At this point in time, the morning *ārtī* and the evening *ārtī* were performed at the *cāvaḍī* but not at the mosque, since Sai Baba would not allow it. The morning or *kākaḍ ārtī* started around 5 AM. It takes its name from the *kākaḍā*, a coarse cloth wick used during the ceremony, which represents the rite of awakening the deity or *guru*. Twice a day, *ārtī*s were also performed at the Dixit and Sathe *vāḍā*s in front of Sai Baba's photograph; see Chitluri, *Baba's Vaani*, 31.

> and heard with my own ears what I only read about but never experienced, i.e. that with every outgoing and indrawing breath of Madhavrao Deshpande comes the clear sound of "Sayin Nath Maharaj, Sayin Nath Baba". This sound is as clear as can be and when Madhavrao snores the words can be heard even at a distance. This is really wonderful and he is in deep sleep all the time.

Upasani 'Vaidya'[41] or Upasani Shastri (1870-1941) had arrived in Shirdi on 27 June 1911 and was to become one of Sai Baba's most highly developed pupils. He lived at the isolated temple of Khaṇḍobā, at the outskirts of the village.[42] He remained under the *faqīr*'s guidance for three years, until 25 July 1914, when he decided to leave.[43] He visited Sai Baba on at least three other occasions – in 1915, 1916, and 1917 – finally settling in the hamlet of Sakori, located just a few miles away from Shirdi, where in 1917 he established his own *ashram* and became famous as Upasani Maharaj.[44]

Looking straight into his eyes, Sai Baba told Khaparde that he must bear his difficulties, accepting them as God's will, since he must learn to be content in whatever state God puts him. Implicitly, he asked him to resort to the fundamental virtue of patience or courageous forbearance (*saburī*), which was one of the saint's constant recommendations to all his devotees. Having family as well as political responsibilities entails inevitable burdens, and one must live up to their role, facing the various problems that may arise with fortitude.[45]

The term *sarkār* means 'lord', 'chieftain', or 'superintendent' and is derived from Persian. Sai Baba often used it to refer to Allāh.[46] The expression he used while looking at Khaparde, *kā sarkār*, could be interpreted to mean 'Why God?' In other words, it could be seen as a question or prayer that Sai Baba directed to God in order to intercede for his devotee, who had to endure all these hardships. Yet another possibility is that the *faqīr* used the term *sarkār* to refer to Khaparde's high status, as he was a 'big man' in a position of authority at a social and political level.[47] In such a case, *kā sarkār* should be interpreted as 'Why lord [Khaparde]?', implying that Sai Baba asked him rhetorically why on earth he had put himself in such a difficult situation.

41 Khaparde calls him Vaidya as he was a doctor (*vaidya*).

42 Khaṇḍobā is a popular Maharashtrian god, originally a pastoral deity, who is worshipped as a form of Śiva. His headquarters is the temple of Jejuri in Pune District. On the Khaṇḍobā temple in Shirdi, see Williams, *Experiencing Sai Baba's Shirdi*, 13-16.

43 Apparently, Sai Baba had told him that he would attain self-realization after staying in Shirdi for four years. Thus, it is believed that he left too soon.

44 On Upasani or Upasni Maharaj, see the 2020 unpublished manuscript of Kevin Shepherd, *Radical Rishi*, accessible in four instalments at www.independentphilosophy.net. By the same author, see *Investigating the Sai Baba Movement*, Part 2; *Sai Baba: Faqir of Shirdi*, 175-7; *Gurus Rediscovered*, 83-142. See also Narasimhaswami, *Life of Sai Baba*, 2: 228-98; Rigopoulos, *Life and Teachings*, 178-9, 185-6, 192-5, 201-2, 426.

45 One is here reminded of *James* 1:2-4: "My brothers, whenever you have to face trials of many kinds, count yourselves supremely happy, in the knowledge that such testing of your faith breeds fortitude, and if you give fortitude full play you will go on to complete a balanced character that will fall short in nothing"; *The New English Bible: New Testament*, 390.

46 See Satpathy, *An Inspiring Life*, 306.

47 See Narasimhaswami, *Life of Sai Baba*, 2: 310.

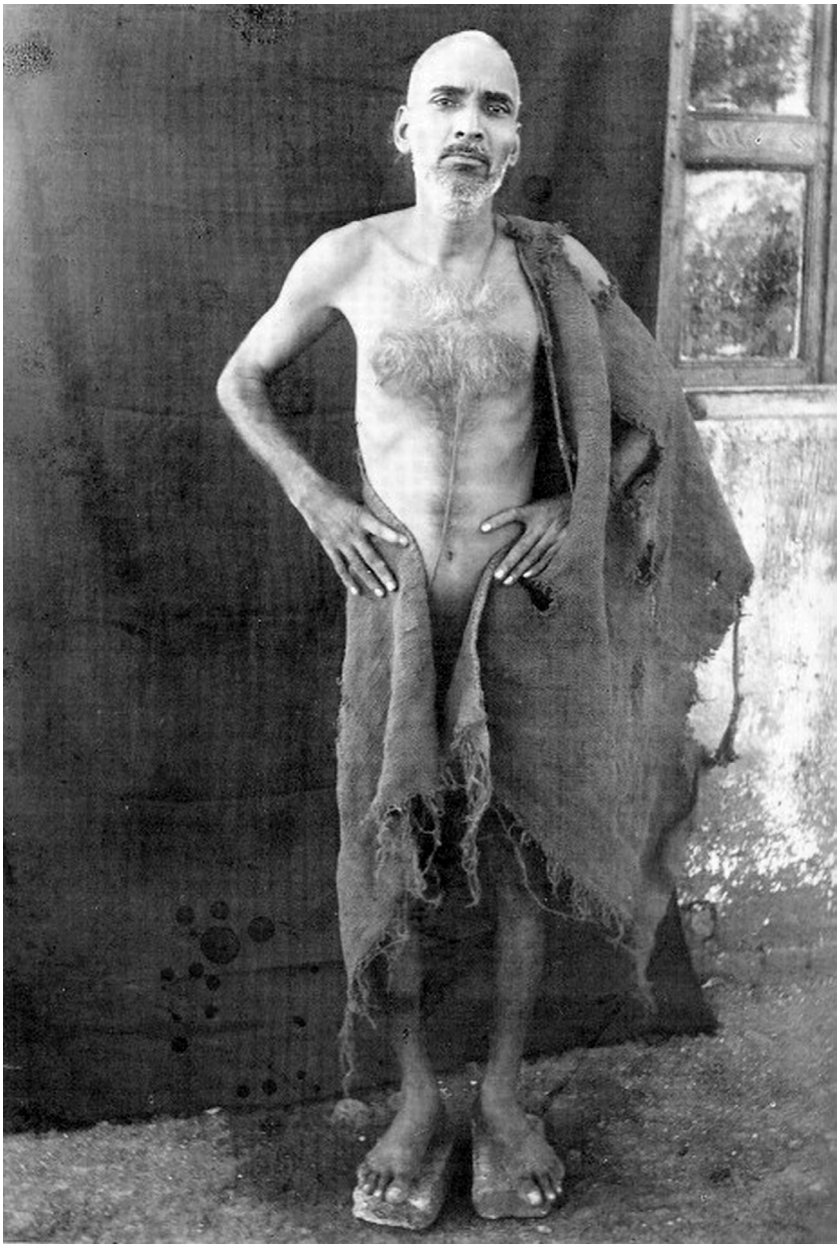

Figure 20 Upasani Maharaj in ascetic attire

The brief tale told by the saint was intended for Khaparde. The rich man forced to work all day for someone else as a slave clearly represents Khaparde – a man who had consecrated his life to serving Tilak's interests and ideals. The fact that he must cook for himself with no aids or servants, surviving on "very rough bread",[48] highlights his solitude and economic hardships. It also implies that all his efforts are of little use and cannot change the situation; at this point, he can only struggle to survive. Nonetheless, it must have been a relief for Khaparde to hear Sai Baba conclude the tale with the words "all on account of temporary difficulty", assuring him that his hard times would eventually come to an end.

Khaparde informs us that the evening was spent together with his son and other devotees chanting hymns (*bhajan*) and conversing on spiritual topics, such as the practice of contemplation (*dhyāna*). Particularly striking is his account of Madhavrao Deshpande, who fell asleep in their midst: one could clearly hear how, with each breath in and out, he recollected Sai Baba's name. He uttered the words "Sayin Nath Maharaj" as he inhaled and "Sayin Nath Baba" as he exhaled, and his recitation could be heard even at a distance. This extraordinary accomplishment testifies to the depth of Madhavrao's *bhakti,* as one who could keep the saint's name on his lips at all times, even in deep sleep. Though a simple villager, he was one of the closest – if not the closest – *bhakta* of Sai Baba, and it may be inferred that it was the *faqīr* who taught him how to achieve this uninterrupted recollection of his name (*nāmasmaraṇa*). Sai Baba must have advised him on how to repeat this particular formula at every breath, giving him instruction on how to maintain its repetition during sleep.[49] Indeed, we know that the saint himself practiced uninterrupted *nāmasmaraṇa*; as he said: "I lie down making mental Namasmarana".[50] For Khaparde, his son Balvant, and the others who had spent hours discussing contemplation, it was a lesson in humility and pure faith (*śraddhā*, *niṣṭhā*) to witness the depth of Madhavrao Deshpande's communion with Sai Baba. A simple villager who had fallen asleep while listening to their learned discourses proved to be far more advanced on the spiritual path than any of them.

Though in his diary Khaparde mentions the daily singing of *bhajan*s and the reading of sacred texts (*pothīpārāyaṇa*, *svādhyāya*), he doesn't say a word about any meditative practices performed by himself or anyone else. In general, he only makes passing references to the routine of his morning prayers. The reason is that in his entries he focuses on Sai Baba's words and deeds, and on what happened in the village collectively. The subject of his own *sādhanā* and that of other devotees was something private that he avoided dealing with or describing in his diary.

48 Possibly *bhākrī*. The simplest of the flat breads, usually made of *jondhḷā* (*Holcus sorghum*) or *bājrī* (*Holcus spicatus*) dough cooked on a griddle. During my field-research in Shirdi, back in October 1985, the son of Madhavrao Deshpande, Uddhavrao, told me that when Sai Baba went out for his round of begging he would cry out: *mā bhākrīān*, i.e., 'Mother, give me some bread'; Rigopoulos, *Oral Testimonies on Sai Baba*, 158.

49 On the remembrance of Sai Baba's name even while sleeping, see Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 155 (chap. 10, v. 77). Madhavrao Deshpande viewed himself as 'Sai Das', the servant or slave of Sai; see Chitluri, *Baba's Vaani*, 53.

50 Narasimhaswami, *Charters and Sayings*, 116. The *faqīr* engaged in the ceaseless repetition of Allāh's name, day and night. As he told his devotee Mhalsapati: "In my heart, the chanting of the Name goes on, ceaselessly. See for yourself, by keeping your hand there and if I happen to fall asleep, wake me up"; Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 750 (chap. 45, v. 139).

> Shirdi, Saturday 9 December 1911
>
> I was late in getting up and finishing my prayer. Mr. Chandorkar came today with a servant. Many others also came and some that were already here went away. Mr. Chandorkar is a very nice simple man, very pleasant in conversation and plain in his dealings.
> *I went to the Masjid and sat long listening to things said there. Sayin Maharaj was in a pleasant mood. I took my hukka there and Sayin Maharaj had a smoke out of it. He looked wonderfully beautiful at Arti time, but dismissed everyone very soon after it. He said he would come to dine with us. He calls my wife "Ajibai".*
> On returning to our lodging, we learned that Mr. Dixit's daughter who was ill passed away. The deceased dreamt a few days ago that Sayin Maharaj kept her under the Nim tree here. *Sayin Maharaj also said yesterday that the girl was dead*. We sat talking about the sad event. The child was only seven years old. I went and saw her mortal remains. They were very beautiful and the expression on her face, after death, was peculiarly charming. It reminded me of the pictures of Madonna that I saw in England.
> The cremation took place behind our lodging. I attended the funeral and did not break fast until 4 PM. Dixit bore the blow wonderfully well. His wife naturally broke down under grief. Everybody sympathizes with her.
> In the evening I went to Chavadi to see Sayin Maharaj both at sunset and later on at Shej Arti time. At night I, Madhavrao Deshpande, Bhishma and others sat talking till late, all about Sayin Maharaj. *Thosar got permission from Sayin Maharaj to return to Bombay*. He will return tomorrow morning.

The diarist's remark that he met Mr. Chandorkar – described as a very nice, simple man and very pleasant in conversation – is noteworthy, since the latter had a significant influence in spreading Sai Baba's fame, having met the saint for the first time twenty years earlier, in 1891.[51] The fact that Khaparde, while at the mosque, "sat long listening to things said there" confirms that in Sai Baba's presence, he preferred to remain silent, focusing intently on the *faqīr*'s words. Moreover, the act of offering his *hukka* (water-pipe) to Sai Baba – who is described as being in a pleasant mood – and the saint's acceptance of it, demonstrates the relaxed atmosphere of the *masjid*. Sharing the *hukka* was considered a special grace for a devotee. This was not uncommon, however, as the *faqīr* had been in the habit of smoking the *cilīm* (clay pipe) and sharing it with his devotees since his early days:

51 See Kamath, Kher, *Sai Baba of Shirdi*, 8. A wealthy Brahmin, Narayan Govind (Nanasaheb) Chandorkar was the Deputy Collector of Ahmednagar and an educated person who held a degree in Philosophy. His knowledge of Vedānta and of Hindu scriptures such as the *Bhagavadgītā* was thorough. Sai Baba once said that he and Chandorkar knew themselves from the past four lives; see Narasimhaswami, *Charters and Sayings*, 211. Chandorkar played a key role in the dissemination of the *faqīr*'s cult, to the point that Narasimhaswami writes that he was "the stem and trunk of the spreading Banyan of Baba, i.e., Baba's St. Paul"; Narasimhaswami, *Life of Sai Baba*, 2: 43. Even Dabholkar in the *Shri Sai Satcharita* states that he was the most eminent among devotees, responsible for spreading Sai Baba's worship in the Bombay Presidency. On Narayan Govind Chandorkar, see Narasimhaswami, *Life of Sai Baba*, 2: 43-121; Shepherd, *Biographical Investigation*, 162-7. With reference to Khaparde and his diary, see *Shirdi Diary of the Hon'ble Mr. G.S. Khaparde*, 17-18, 35, 41, 87, 94, 98.

> Sai Baba, at the *masjid*, cultivated a very informal and brotherly atmosphere. He often lit his earthen pipe and smoked. Sometimes, a devotee would prepare the *cilīm* for Baba. When pleased, Sai passed the pipe around, so that everyone could take a puff and share the pleasure. In this way, the intimacy between Sai Baba and his devotees grew. Mhalsapati, Shyama, Bayajibai, Tukaram Darji, Appa Jogle, Tatya Kote, Kashinatha and others would sit around him and listen to his stories. Often, the villagers would hear hearty laughs coming from the mosque.[52]

Khaparde's observation that Sai Baba "looked wonderfully beautiful at Arti time" probably means that he exhibited a peculiar lustre on his face: several devotees have pointed out the radiance of his gaze. The detail that the *faqīr* used to call Khaparde's wife 'Ajibai' is not surprising given that he often nicknamed his *bhakta*s. This term is a mark of respect meaning 'grandmother' or 'old lady', and its use shows Sai Baba's fondness for her.



Figure 21 From left to right, Mhalsapati, Sai Baba, and Madhavrao Deshpande alias Shyama, circa 1900

The reason why he dismissed everyone soon after the *ārtī* celebration is likely related to the tragic death of Dixit's seven-year-old daughter, an event the saint had foreseen the day before. Khaparde's comment that "the deceased dreamt a few days ago that Sayin Maharaj kept her under the Nim tree here", tallies with a story he had heard from the saint a year before, on 10 December 1910. At that time, Sai Baba told a story about the former life of a young girl playing with him at the mosque, saying that "he kept her in

52 Rigopoulos, *Life and Teachings*, 90. Devotee Shantabai Joshi recalls: "Baba would sometimes take his unlit *chillum* (clay pipe) and puff at it, and suddenly the unlit *chillum* would ignite on its own accord and the smoke would rise up to the sky"; Chitluri, *Baba's Divine Symphony*, 30.

a Babul tree and then brought her here". This *nīm* (*Azadirachta indica*) is the tree under which Sai Baba is said to have spent several years in his youth and is considered the site of his *guru*'s tomb (*gurusthān*).[53] The belief that trees are the abode of spirits – and thus linked with death – is a common one. Khaparde must have viewed the girl's dream as a premonition; at the same time, the detail that Sai Baba "kept her" under his *nīm* tree offered consolation to Dixit and his wife, as it implied the saint would protect her and oversee her future rebirth.

> Shirdi, Sunday 10 December 1911
>
> In the morning before I finished my prayer Dattatreya Chitnis, Solicitor of Bombay, came. He was a freshman when I was a fellow in the college. So he is an old friend. We naturally sat talking of old days and so on. *As usual I saw Sayin Maharaj as he went out and later again when he returned and sat in his usual place*.
> We all returned after Arti. The breakfast was a bit late and after it I sat talking with Upasani and later on with Mr. Nanasaheb Chandorkar. He is the chief, if not the oldest disciple of Sayin Maharaj. He is a very pleasant man, gave me his history as to how he came into contact with Sayin Maharaj and made his progress. He wished to tell me the instructions he received but people gathered and the thing could not be disclosed to the view of all.
> I made two attempts to see Sayin Maharaj in the afternoon, but *he was not in the mood to see anybody*. *I saw him in the evening near the Chavadi* and had a long talk with Sathe Saheb, Chitnis and others.
> There is one Gokhale who has come from Narsoba Wadi. He says he was directed to see Narayan Maharaj of Kedgaon[54] and Sayin Maharaj. He sings very nicely and at night I got him to sing a few Bhajans. Mr. Nanasaheb Chandorkar returned to Thane today.
> Balasaheb Bhate, who got a son a few days ago, lost him this evening. This was very sad. *Sayin Maharaj this afternoon prepared some medicine which he took*.

53 Sai Baba once said that underneath this tree was the sepulchre (*turbat*) of a *pīr* and that it was the place of his ancestors. When the villagers dug up the ground, they were surprised to find that there was a sepulchre; see Pradhan, *Shri Sai Baba of Shirdi*, 42. Shantabai Joshi confirms that even around 1913, Sai Baba continued to sit under this *nīm* tree; Chitluri, *Baba's Divine Symphony*, 29. On this *nīm* as the seat of Sai Baba's *guru*, see Satpathy, *An Inspiring Life*, 58-67; Rigopoulos, "Sāī Bābā and Yoga Powers", 394-7, 401-9; Rigopoulos, *Life and Teachings*, 47-9. See also Williams, *Experiencing Sai Baba's Shirdi*, 17-26.

54 According to Meher Baba, he was one of the five perfect masters of his time, together with Sai Baba, Upasani Maharaj, Tajuddin Baba (1861-1925) of Nagpur and Hazrat Babajan (d. 1931) of Pune. Regarding this belief, see Satpathy, *Perfect Masters*. On the popular worship of five saints, see Crooke, "Panchpiriyā", 600-1.

Khaparde acknowledges Nanasaheb Chandorkar's importance by defining him as "the chief, if not the oldest disciple[55] of Sayin Maharaj". Chandorkar explained to Khaparde the circumstances that first brought him to the saint. The diarist's observation that he "wished to tell him the instructions he received" from Sai Baba is noteworthy, since devotees usually talked about the *faqīr*'s miracles rather than his *upadeśa*. This shows the seriousness of Chandorkar as a disciple who, knowing Khaparde's moral and intellectual stature, was willing to entrust him with the main teachings that Sai Baba had given him over the years. Unfortunately, they could not be disclosed since "people gathered", and thus Chandorkar did not feel comfortable talking about them in front of everyone. The *guru*'s teachings are a sensitive matter that deserves to be shared only with trustworthy people; spiritual instruction is not to be divulged indiscriminately, as there is the risk of casting "pearls before swine" (*Matthew* 7:6).

In the afternoon, Sai Baba "was not in the mood to see anybody", a state that seems related to the tragedy of the death of Balasaheb Bhate's newborn son shortly thereafter. It must be remembered that at the beginning of the 20th century, the child mortality rate in India was very high: over half of all children did not survive past the age of five. Khaparde writes that during the day the *faqīr* was busy preparing "some medicine", which confirms his role as a doctor and his knowledge of herbal remedies. Although Sai Baba's medicine was administered to the infant, it was to no avail, and he passed away in the evening.

> Shirdi, Monday 11 December 1911
>
> The prayer this morning was very very pleasant and after it I felt quite elevated. Then I sat explaining the first few verses of the Panchadashi to Dattatreya Chitnis. He is a very nice man.
> *Then we visited Sayin Maharaj, both as he went out and after he returned. He gave me the chilim very often and grapes that Radhakrishna Bai had sent. He gave the grapes twice to my son Balvant.*
> *In the afternoon, I heard that he was cleaning the Masjid.* So I did not attempt to go that side. All the people brought a deputation to Sayin Maharaj to get rid of the plague. *He advised them to clean the roads, sweep the tombs and burning and burial ghats and to feed the poor.* I spent the whole afternoon reading the daily papers and talking to Chitnis and others. Upasani is composing something.
> *In the evening we saw Sayin Maharaj near the Chavadi* and again attended the Shej Arti after which Chitnis, his engineer friend and another went away. I intend retiring early.

55 He would also provide interpretations of Sai Baba's enigmatic utterances. The saint once told him: "This Muslim gentleman had kept a box with me a long time ago. Now he is asking for it to be returned. He has no wish to let me keep it. Then what is the point of keeping it? It's best to return it. Why keep it for no reason?" Chandorkar interpreted the narrative in this way: "The box represents 'a good deed'. In his previous life this man had contact with Baba. He did some good deed, and in this life he is asking for the fruit or result of that deed. The fruit or result of that good deed being Baba's help in procuring [him] the licence"; Chitluri, *Baba's Vaani*, 62-4.

The diarist's mention that he explained the first verses of the *Pañcadaśī* to his friend Dattatreya Chitnis evidences his knowledge of Sanskrit and of Advaita Vedānta philosophy. As Dabholkar states in the *Shri Sai Satcharita* (chap. 27, v. 145): "That Dadasaheb [Khaparde], from whom it was a privilege to get the '*Panchadashi*' of Vidyaranya explained, even he used to be silent once he came to the mosque".[56] The *Pañcadaśī* ascribed to Vidyāraṇya (14th century CE) is a popular manual of nondual Vedānta that in its fifteen chapters illustrates the author's interpretation of the philosophy of Śaṅkara (ca. 700 CE), the most significant exponent of the Vedānta school of nondualism (*advaita*). When interviewed by Narasimhaswami in May 1936, Ganpatrao G. Narke remembered that, referring to the *Pañcadaśī*, Sai Baba said to Khaparde: "This is our treasury" (*eto ammārā khajnā hai*), adding that "it contains whatever is valuable for our spiritual welfare".[57]

Khaparde notes with satisfaction how, at the mosque, Sai Baba shared the *cilīm* with him "very often". He also shared the grapes that Radhakrishna Bai had expressly sent for the saint with both Khaparde and his son Balvant – twice with the latter. The *faqīr*'s act of sharing his pipe and the grapes was a sign of intimacy that all *bhakta*s craved, being an indication of his favor.

In the afternoon, Khaparde did not go to the mosque, having heard that Sai Baba was busy cleaning it. The fact that village representatives went to the saint pleading for protection against the plague is noteworthy. The first case of bubonic plague – the most common form, caused by the bite of an infected flea – was reported in Bombay in 1896. Over the next few decades, the plague killed millions in British India, most of them poor people who lived and worked in cramped surroundings.[58]

The Shirdi villagers believed that the saint, through his powers, could eradicate or 'send away' the terrible disease and even prevent it from crossing the village boundaries. Sai Baba, however, did not reassure them by saying that he would take care of it through some miraculous intervention; instead, he made them face their own responsibilities by telling them what they should do to achieve the goal. Thus, he advised them to clean the village – just as he had set the example by cleaning the *masjid* – focusing in particular on its roads and burial grounds, and feed the poor by concretely caring for their welfare. The antidote he prescribed was a combination of

56 Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 445.

57 Narasimhaswami, *Devotees' Experiences*, 22.

58 On the recurring plague epidemics, see Echenberg, *Plague Ports*. When confronted with a dreadful disease, the villagers would always resort to Sai Baba; see Chitluri, *Baba's Vaani*, 22. Referring to the death of one of his devotees due to cholera, the *faqīr* – echoing *Bhagavadgītā* 2.22 – consoled the anguished wife with these words: "Do not grieve. Death waits for every one. Birth and death are the acts of the Almighty. […] When the clothes become old and frayed you throw them away. In the same way the soul which is immortal, casts off the worn out body. Do not, therefore, ask for *udi* to patch up the old rags. Do not stop him, let him go. He has reached his life's goal. He will go to heaven. Right now he is changing his clothes in front of me" (Chitluri, *Baba's Vaani*, 22).

hygiene[59] and compassion. Indeed, the plague is a disease of poverty caused, at least in part, by unsanitary living conditions. Villagers were called to eradicate both their outer and inner impurity, which was understood to be the cause of the epidemic.

> Shirdi, Tuesday 12 December 1911
>
> I and Bhishma got up very early under the impression that the Kakad Arti was about to begin but we were early by about an hour. Later on Megha came and we attended the Arti. Then I prayed and sat waiting for Sayin Maharaj to go out. *I saw him then and again after he returned*. I spent the interval in listening to the songs of Gokhale. He sings well.
> Today the breakfast was late as Megha could not get the leaves of *Bel* and had to go a long distance for them.
> So the midday Puja was not finished till about 1:30 PM. *Sayin Maharaj was in a very good mood and sat chatting and laughing*. After we returned and sat to our breakfast, a man is said to have come to call me to the Local Durbar held here in the school. By the time I finished my meal and came out, the whole thing was over. Some poor were fed by the munificence of Nanasaheb Sathe. He left instructions for the purpose and Mr. H.S. Dixit took a great deal of trouble about the matter. The food could not have been very good.
> After breakfast I lay down for a few minutes and then went with my people to the Masjid. *Sayin Maharaj was in a good mood and* ***told a story. Taking up a fruit lying there, he asked me how many fruits it was capable of producing. I replied as many tens of thousands as there were seeds in it. He smiled very pleasantly and added that it obeyed laws of its own. He also told how there was a girl very good and pious, how she served him and prospered.***
> *We got 'Udi' about sunset and then stood opposite the Chavadi to see Sayin Maharaj when he came out for his evening stroll. We saw him* and returned and sat listening to the Bhajan of Bhishma, Gokhale, Bhai and one young man Dixit. Madhavrao Deshpande and Upasani were present. The evening passed very pleasantly.

Megha or Megha Shyam was an orthodox *śaiva* Brahmin who first came to Shirdi in 1908 sent by Rao Bahadur Hari Vinayak Sathe, whom he faithfully served. Although he was initially full of prejudice and feared contamination from approaching a Muslim *faqīr*, he later came to identify Sai Baba with Śiva himself; starting in March 1911, he became the officiant of the *ārtī* ceremonies at the *masjid*.[60] The fact that the midday *pūjā* was delayed because "Megha

59 In Maharashtra, the one who made the broom a symbol of cleanliness and self-help was the illiterate saint, *kīrtankār*, and social reformer Gadge Baba (1876-1956), also known as Gadgi Bua, of the low washerman caste; see Schultz, *Singing a Hindu Nation*, 60-4. See also Maidamwar, *Gadge Maharaj*; Shirwadkar, *The Wandering Saint*. It is reported that Gadge Baba, who always carried a broom with him, visited Sai Baba at Shirdi; see Shepherd, *Faqir of Shirdi*, 168-9; Shepherd, *Biographical Investigation*, 50-1; Chitluri, *Baba's Divine Symphony*, 68-9. On one occasion, when Sai Baba saw Gadge Baba, he started hurling foul abuses. Gadge Baba, however, laughed at this, realizing that the harsh words were not directed against him, but against the evil forces causing his misfortune; see http://saiamrithadhara.com/mahabhakthas/dadasaheb_khaparde.html, 10.

60 On Megha, see Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 461-9 (chap. 28, vv. 117-214); Shepherd, *Biographical Investigation*, 252-4.

could not get the leaves of *Bel* and had to go a long distance for them", shows Megha's faith that Sai Baba was a manifestation of his chosen deity, as *bel* or *bilva* leaves (*Aegle marmelos*) are an essential element of Śiva's worship.

As always, Khaparde is keen to write that he, along with the other devotees, "sat waiting for Sayin Maharaj to go out" of the mosque – likely to the Lendi gardens[61] – and that he "saw him then and again after he returned". This shows the importance attributed to the experience of silent *darśan* – of seeing the holy person or deity and of being seen by him.[62] In time, all the saint's movements – his journeys to and from the *masjid*, whether for the Lendi gardens, his begging rounds, or the *cāvaḍī* – became increasingly fixed and ritualized. Devotees cherished these moments as sacred occasions during which the holy man would radiate his spiritual energy and shower his grace upon them.



Figure 22 Sai Baba on his begging rounds in Shirdi's marketplace, circa 1912

61 See Satpathy, *An Inspiring Life*, 68-76.

62 See Valpey, "*Pūjā* and *darśana*", 380-94.



Figure 23 Sai Baba on his way to the Lendi gardens, circa 1916. Left to right, Nanasaheb Nimonkar, Sai Baba, Bhagoji Shinde, Gopalrao Buti and Nana Chopdar

The fact that Sai Baba "was in a very good mood and sat chatting and laughing" proves the fraternal atmosphere that characterized his meetings at the mosque, during which the *faqīr* put those present at ease. Furthermore, the fact that "some poor were fed by the munificence of Nanasaheb Sathe" – as Sai Baba had advised the villagers to do only the day before – must have pleased the saint, as must the fact that Kakasaheb Dixit made all the arrangements for this *annadān* and took "a great deal of trouble about the matter". Khaparde's observation that the food "could not have been very good" is likely due to Sathe and Dixit prioritizing quantity over quality, or perhaps because the meal was served somewhat late.

Being in a "good mood" in the afternoon, Sai Baba amused everyone by telling a story – about which no details are given – and by posing a question. Addressing Khaparde, he asked him a riddle about how many fruits a nearby fruit was capable of producing. Khaparde's reply – "as many tens of thousands as there were seeds in it" – was prompt and clever, and the *faqīr* approved with a smile. The saint's question reminds everyone of nature's extraordinary generative potency. He underlines that such latent potency – almost limitless – "obeys laws of its own". This exchange is reminiscent of the famous dialogue between Uddālaka Āruṇi and his son Śvetaketu in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.12.1-3:

> 'Bring a banyan fruit'.
> 'Here it is, sir'.
> 'Cut it up'.
> 'I've cut it up, sir'.
> 'What do you see there?'
> 'These quite tiny seeds, sir'.
> 'Now, take one of them and cut it up'.
> 'I've cut one up, sir'.
> 'What do you see there?'
> 'Nothing, sir'.
> Then he told him: 'This finest essence here, son, that you can't even see – look how on account of that finest essence this huge banyan tree stands here'.
> 'Believe, my son: the finest essence here – that constitutes the self of this whole world; that is the truth; that is the self (*ātman*). And that's how you are, Śvetaketu'.[63]

Sai Baba may have been familiar with a popular couplet of the Maharashtrian poet-saint Tukārām (d. 1650): "To begin with there is only one seed which sprouts and grows into a sapling, and then into a big tree. This tree will create many seeds which in turn will give birth to innumerable trees".[64]

63 Olivelle, *Upaniṣads*, 154.

64 Jory, *Beyond Freedom*, 19.

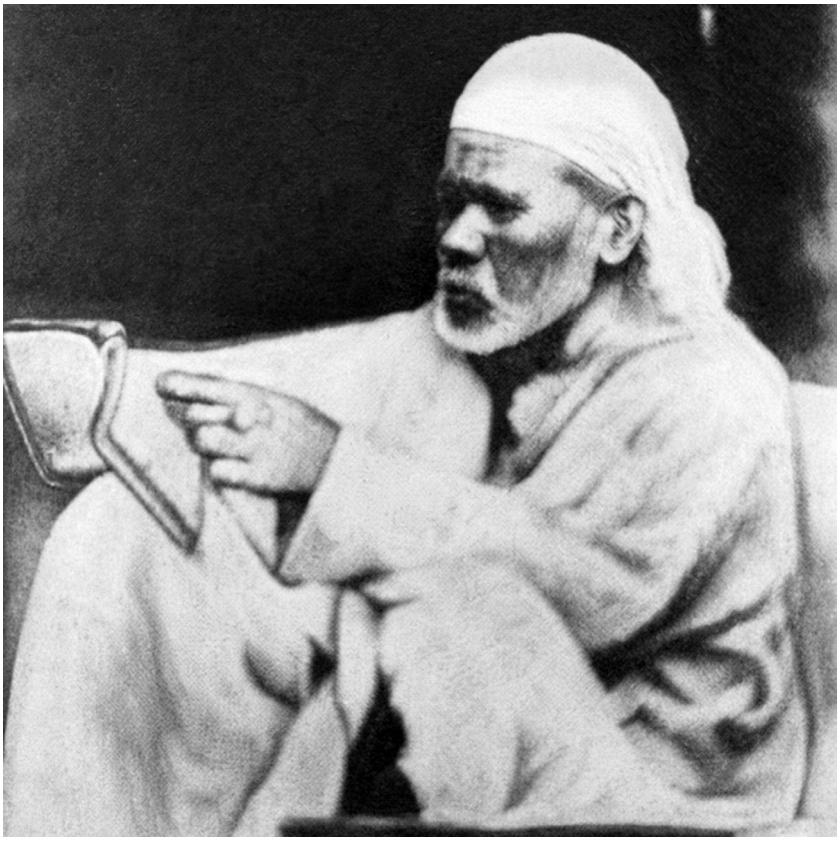

Figure 24 Sai Baba looking at the *Tukārām Gāthā*, a collection of poems by poet-saint Tukārām (d. 1650)

As Jesus says in one of his parables, in which he compares the kingdom of God to a seed (*Mark* 4:27), "[T]he seed sprouts and grows – how, he [= the sower] does not know".[65] The idea is that everything in nature follows its own laws and *dharma*. By posing this question to Khaparde, Sai Baba wished to highlight the unfathomable mystery of God's creation, which man must enjoy responsibly and of which he is part and parcel. Man must contemplate the magnificence of the Lord's creation with wonder, never taking it for granted.[66] In other words, one must discover God's abiding presence in all that surrounds one, even in a simple fruit. A saying (*sakhī*) attributed to Kabīr proclaims that "the Infinite resides even in the infinitely small, though nobody bothers to search for Its presence there".[67] The tiny seed, contrasting with its superabundant potential for generating countless fruits, serves as

65 *The New English Bible: New Testament*, 63. A comparison with Jesus' parables is not out of place given that Sufi authors and saints make frequent references to Jesus as a master of the way; there exists a vast body of oral tradition about him current among Sufi adepts and brotherhoods throughout the Middle East. For an introduction, see Skali, *Gesù nella tradizione sufi*.

66 Saying number 2 of the *Gospel of Thomas* comes to mind (*POxi* 654.5-9): "Jesus said: 'Let the one seeking not stop seeking until he finds. And when he finds he will marvel, and marveling he will reign, and reigning he will rest'".

67 Mishra, *Mistici indiani medievali*, 251 (my translation).

a metaphor for the wondrous power (*śakti*) of God – and of the saint. Yet, this seminal power, present in the whole of creation, also resides within every human being. Along with the power of generating, one must bear in mind the seeds and fruits of one's own actions (*karman*) – bodily, vocal, and mental – through which one is called to self-sanctification by engendering countless bounteous results (*phala*).[68] From a Hindu perspective, fruitfulness is the direct consequence of adhering to *dharma* (righteousness), as this is what sanctifies the life of the individual and society as a whole. The saint of Shirdi would have surely approved of Jesus' saying in *John* 15:16: "I appointed you to go on and bear fruit, fruit that shall last; so that the Father may give you all that you ask in my name".[69]

On the other hand, B.V. Narasimhaswami proposes an altogether different interpretation of the riddle, claiming that through it Sai Baba aimed at criticizing Khaparde's sexual excesses. This he deduces from the fact that the saint called Khaparde's wife Ajibai (grandmother) and that the following day he offered personal advice to Khaparde "very very kindly in a truly fatherly way", after sending away all other people present at the mosque. Though the content of such advice is unknown – Khaparde remaining silent about it – Narasimhaswami is convinced that the saint must have given him an instruction concerning his sexual life. Such a reading is grounded in Narasimhaswami's prejudice that Khaparde was a worldly man who could not give up his craving for sex and wealth:

> Certainly at 58,[70] the Sastras [= Scriptures] want persons to give up Grihastasrama [= the householder's stage of life] and take to… Vanaprastha [= the forest dweller/hermit's stage of life] leading on to Sanyasa [= the renouncer's stage of life]. That cannot be done if the sex element is allowed to preponderate. So Baba conveyed very gentle lessons after giving "fatherly advice" to Khaparde driving others away from the Mosque at that time so that he might give that advice in private to Khaparde. No doubt Khaparde does not give out what the fatherly advice was about. But there is not much difficulty in inferring that the above point must have formed a portion of that advice. […] On one occasion, he asked Khaparde pointing to a fruit, "How many fruits it is capable of producing?" Khaparde's answer was, "Thousand times the number of seeds in it". Baba assented and said that the vegetable followed a law of its own. This means that vegetable creation can follow the instinct for reproduction *ad libitum*, but humanity has restraints and high standards in order to achieve higher and higher levels of being. As already stated, Khaparde's inability to see the same lesson conveyed by Baba when he called Mrs. Khaparde 'Ajibai' is something striking. 'Ajibai' means old lady or grandmother, that is, the grandmother's stage is one at which no

68 One is reminded of Jesus' parables of the sower and the seed (*Matthew* 13:1-23; *Mark* 4:1-20; *Luke* 8:4-15), as well as the parable in which the kingdom is compared to a mustard seed (*Matthew* 13:31-2; *Mark* 4:30-2; *Luke* 13:18-19). One is also reminded of the poetry of Mīrzā 'Abd al-Qādir Bīdil (1644-1720), one of the greatest Indo-Persian poets; see Pellò, *Microcosmografie*, 45-89 ("Di semi e di germogli: natura e immaginazione tra Bīdil, Bruno e Campanella").

69 *The New English Bible: New Testament*, 181.

70 In December 1911, Khaparde was 57 years old, having been born on 27 August 1854. According to Hindu custom, however, a person is often considered to be one year old at birth, as the nine months of pregnancy are counted as the first year of life.

> further thoughts of sex reproduction should be entertained. Any person would easily see that Baba's use of that term conveyed a hint to Mr. Khaparde that he should no longer regard his wife as one for purposes of sex gratification or reproduction but must treat her as a soul companion for spiritual purposes mainly. All these lessons given to Khaparde were lost upon him completely. Neither about wealth nor about sex control was he in a mood to take lessons.[71]

Certainly, the best fruits are those reaped by the girl of whom Sai Baba speaks. She is portrayed as a good and pious soul who, having served the saint, attained lasting prosperity. The teaching is that the master will care in every respect for whoever, from a tender age, devotes themselves to the *guru*/*pīr* and serves him wholeheartedly, and that their life will be fulfilled. Selfless service (*sevā*) to the *guru*/*pīr* is the primary duty of the pupil, which must be practiced and perfected at all times, just as the *faqīr* himself had done with his own master. Nothing else is needed.[72] Significantly, he directed his devotee Justice M.B. Rege, a magistrate of the Indore High Court, to give up his practice of *yoga*, saying: "Do *bhakti*, nothing more is necessary. Only let your heart, head and hand be one".[73]

A poignant tale narrated by Sai Baba to Anantrao Patankar about the indispensability of *bhakti* and its nine limbs is found in the *Shri Sai Satcharita* (chap. 21, vv. 87-8). We read:

> There once came a merchant, when a horse standing in front of him happened to drop nine nodules of dung. Quick to seize his own advantage, the merchant at once spread his *uparna* (a small piece of cloth on the shoulder) to catch them and as he tied them all up securely in it, his mind became steady and concentrated.[74]

71 Narasimhaswami, *Life of Sai Baba*, 2: 327-8. See also *ibid*., 322.

72 B.V. Narasimhaswami reports that Sai Baba once stated: "For twelve years I waited on my *guru* who is peerless and loving. How can I describe his love to me? When he was *dyanastha* (i.e., in love-trance) I sat and gazed at him. We were both filled with bliss. I cared not to turn my eye upon anything else. Night and day I poured upon his face with an ardour of love that banished hunger and thirst. The *guru*'s absence, even for a second, made me restless. I meditated on nothing but the *guru*, and had no goal, or object, other than the *guru*. Unceasingly fixed upon him was my mind. Wonderful indeed, the art of my *guru*! I wanted nothing but the *guru* and he wanted nothing but this intense love from me. Apparently inactive, he never neglected me, but always protected me by his glance. That *guru* never blew any *mantra* into my ear. By his grace, I attained to my present state. Making the *guru* the sole object of one's thoughts and aims one attains *paramartha*, the Supreme Goal. This is the only truth the *guru* taught me. The four Sadhanas [= the paths of action, devotion, asceticism and knowledge] and six Sastras [= the six systems of Hindu philosophy] are not necessary. *Trusting in the guru fully is enough*" (Narasimhaswami, *Charters and Sayings*, 60-1). On the powerful glance of love that banishes hunger and thirst, noteworthy is the metaphor employed by Dabholkar in his *Shri Sai Satcharita*, where he writes that the little ones of a tortoise are nurtured on the mother's loving glances; see Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 570 (chap. 35, vv. 17-19). On turtles and their emotions, see Montgomery, *Of Time and Turtles*. Regarding the need for *guru* worship, there are countless references in the sources; see Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 851 (chap. 51, vv. 211-13), which allegedly reports Sai Baba's own words.

73 Chitluri, *Baba's Vaani*, 37. Rege noted that "what he [= Sai Baba] really wanted was love – deep, intense, passionate, wholehearted love. To give him that was my aim. He knew it and read it in my heart and responded to it – as only he could respond"; Narasimhaswami, *Devotees' Experiences*, 8. On M.B. Rege's interaction with Sai Baba, see *ibid*., 1-13; Satpathy, *An Inspiring Life*, 84-6.

74 Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 345.

Here is how devotee Dada Kelkar beautifully explained the meaning of the parable to Anantrao:

> God's grace is this horse. And the nine lumps of the dung are the nine different types of devotion. Without devotion God cannot be attained. By knowledge alone, He cannot be reached. Know, that the ninefold path of devotion is as follows. The first is *Shravan* (hearing the attributes, excellences or wondrous achievements of, as read or recited), the second *Keertan* (reciting); the third *Smaran* (calling to mind and meditating upon the names and perfections of); fourth *Paadsevan* (washing, kneading, etc., of the feet of); fifth, *Archana* (outward worship or common service and presenting *naivedya*[75]); sixth, *Vandan* (adoration); seventh, *Daasya* (service, in general); eighth, *Sakhya* (cultivating fellowship) and ninth, *Atmanivedan* (consecration of one's self unto). If even one out of these is practised with implicit trust in the heart, Shri Hari, who hungers after nothing else (but devotion), will appear to the devotee in his own abode. […] What is needed is a devotion full of love. Consider yourself to be the merchant and then try to understand the implications of this transaction, which is, that once the banner of the ninefold path of devotion flies high, God, the Lord of Knowledge, is pleased. […] [I]f you hold fast to the ninefold path of devotion your mind will repose in peace. And that alone will steady the mind, make it solemn and serious and will create goodwill towards all. In its absence, wavering and unsteadiness are inevitable. So says Guruvarya,[76] affectionately.[77]

> Shirdi, Wednesday 13 December 1911
>
> I got up as usual, prayed and wished to bathe but hot water was not ready. So I came out and sat talking. *I saluted Sayin Maharaj as he went out* and then had my bath. I read Panchadashi. *Later on I went to see Sayin Maharaj at the Masjid* and returned after Arti.
> About 4 PM, I went away with Balvant, Bhishma and Bauda who brought my *hukka* and *Sayin Maharaj had a smoke out of it*. Madhavrao asked for permission for me to return to Amravati *but Sayin Maharaj said that he would decide about it tomorrow morning. He got all the people there out of the Masjid and advised me very very kindly in a truly fatherly way.*
> *At sunset we went again and saw him opposite the Chavadi* and later on attended the Shej Arti. Then Bhishma had his Panchapadi[78] earlier than usual. Bhai also sang a Bhajan.

Sai Baba's acceptance of Khaparde's *hukka* was once again an honor for the latter, confirming that the saint looked benevolently upon him and recognized him as one of his close *bhakta*s. The fact that Madhavrao Deshpande interceded

75 The food offered to a deity. On *naivedya*, see Czerniak-Drożdżowicz, "The Food of Gods", 177-90.

76 'The best of *guru*s', i.e., Sai Baba.

77 Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 345-6 (chap. 21, vv. 94-101). See also Narasimhaswami, *Charters and Sayings*, 23.

78 A five-line (*pañcpadī*) devotional song, a popular format within the Maharashtrian Vārkarī tradition.

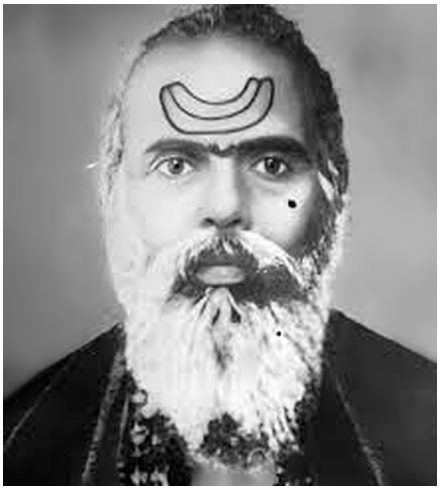

Figure 25 Krishnashastri Jageshwar Bhishma

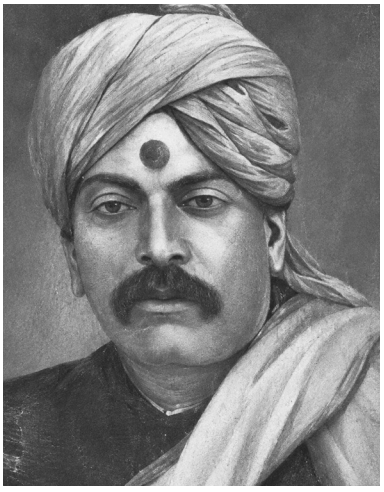

Figure 26 The Shirdi villager Madhavrao Deshpande, known as Shyama



Figure 27
Narayan Govind Chandorkar, known as Nanasaheb Chandorkar

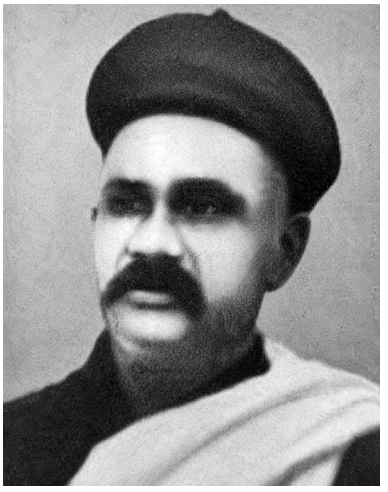

Figure 28 Hari Vinayak Sathe

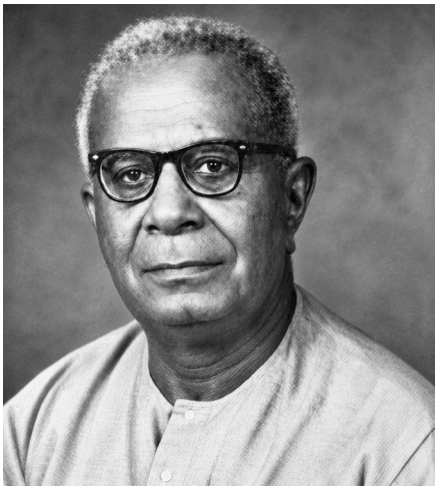

Figure 29 Justice M.B. Rege



Figure 30 Balasaheb Bhate

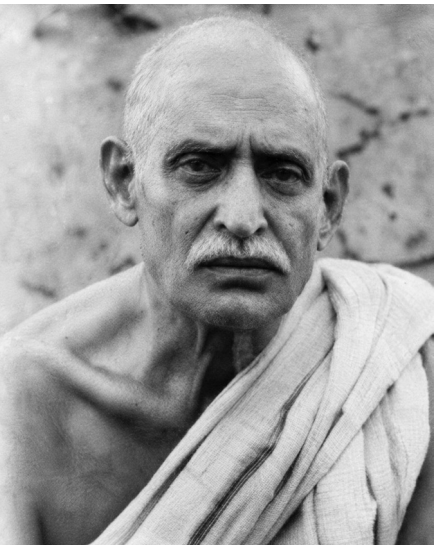

Figure 31 Sakharam Hari, known as Bapusaheb Jog

on Khaparde's behalf by asking Sai Baba to grant him permission to leave shows that Khaparde wished to return to Amravati and resume his business and political activities; his plan was to stay in Shirdi for no more than a week, as he had done the year before. The *faqīr*'s postponement of his decision until the following day, however, indicates that he had different plans for his devotee.

In the afternoon, Sai Baba asked everyone to leave the mosque and gave a private interview to Khaparde – a rare privilege. The latter remains entirely silent about its contents, noting only that the saint "advised me very very kindly in a truly fatherly way", which indicates the deep affection with which Sai Baba spoke to him. We can only speculate on what was said; it was certainly something deeply personal, a 'secret' between the saint and his devotee. Khaparde probably thought that this special *upadeśa* was the saint's way of concluding his visit and saying goodbye, just before granting him formal permission to leave Shirdi.

Narasimhaswami's guess that the saint's advice to Khaparde concerned his sexual life is possibly right; however, it could also have concerned other aspects of his personal or family life. The saint's counsel might even have dealt with Khaparde's political involvement and his critical situation, though I consider this less likely – had this been the case, Khaparde would probably have mentioned it in his diary.

In any case, given that the riddle of the seed and the story of the "very good and pious" girl told the previous day appear to be linked – and were certainly intended for everyone present at the *masjid* – I believe my proposed explanation is both plausible and coherent. Indeed, both levels of interpretation – the general and the personal – are appropriate, which illustrates the inherent polysemy of the *faqīr*'s words.

What I disagree with is Narasimhaswami's characterization of Khaparde as a purely worldly man who would take lessons from Sai Baba "neither about wealth nor about sex control". As noted, this is an unfair portrait, given that Khaparde was a profoundly religious person and a genuine devotee of Sai Baba.

> Shirdi, Thursday 14 December 1911
>
> Wishing to go away I got up early, attended the Kakad Arti and praying somewhat in haste went to Sayin Maharaj at the Masjid with Madhavrao Deshpande. *Sayin Maharaj said that I could go tomorrow or so and added that I should serve God alone and no one else. He said: "What God gives is never exhausted and what man gives never lasts".*
> Then I returned, and saw Durvesh Saheb Falke of Kalyan arrive.[79] He is a very nice gentleman of the old sort. Mr. Shingne and his wife are with him. Mr. Shingne is a High

79 His exact name was Durvesh Haji Mohamad Siddique Phalke. He was a Muslim who hailed from Kalyan, a city in the Thane District of Maharashtra, where he was born in 1841. He was a rich landowner (*zamindār*), a knowledgeable and spiritual person who had travelled widely, even outside of India. Chapter 11 of the *Shri Sai Satcharita* (vv. 77-113) narrates his first, memorable visit to Shirdi (date unknown), during which Sai Baba initially refused to see him and prevented him from entering the mosque. Finally, through the mediation of Madhavrao Deshpande, Sai Baba put him to the test by posing three questions to him. The saint exhibited tremendous wrath at Phalke's final answer before ultimately accepting him as one of his dearest devotees; see Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 172-5. On this episode and a tentative explanation of the symbolism of Sai Baba's questions, see Chitluri, *Baba's Rinanubandh*, 49-54. On Durvesh Haji Mohamad Siddique Phalke, see Shepherd, *Biographical Investigation*, 149-50.

> Court Vakil[80] of Bombay and has a law class also. He said that the partition of Bengal has been naturally modified, that Delhi has been substituted for Calcutta as capital and that some prisoners have been released, but their names etc. are not yet known.
> I attended the mid-day *puja* and had my breakfast with Bapusaheb Jog. After it I lay down and fell asleep.
> I went to the Masjid a little late and then *made my namaskar near the Chavadi*. Then I sat talking with Durvesh Saheb and Shingne.
> Later on Bhishma had his daily Bhajan.

Hoping that Sai Baba would grant him permission to leave, Khaparde woke up early. After the morning *ārtī*, he went eagerly to the mosque accompanied by Madhavrao Deshpande, who intended to put in a good word on his behalf. To his dismay, however, the *faqīr* did not grant permission, replying evasively that he could depart "tomorrow or so". This uncertainty made Khaparde realize that Sai Baba intended to keep him in Shirdi much longer than he had expected. Significantly, the saint warned him that "he should serve God alone and no one else". In other words, his anxious preoccupation with politics and with serving the interests of B.G. Tilak was misplaced: worldly affairs should not take the place of God, to whom alone man must devote his heart and mind. As Jesus warned, "For where your wealth is, there will your heart be also" (*Matthew* 6:21).[81]

Moreover, Sai Baba pointed out to him that "what God gives is never exhausted and what man gives never lasts", underlining the futility of all worldly achievements. God's grace is permanent, whereas what man gives and achieves – riches, political power, fame – is subject to decay and is ultimately delusive. Thus, one must learn not to become attached to the world. God, on the other hand, values surrender and accepts whatever is offered to him in purity and devotion. As Kṛṣṇa states in *Bhagavadgītā* 9.26: "A leaf, a flower, a fruit, or water, who presents to Me with devotion, that offering of devotion I accept from the devout-souled (giver)".[82] Finally, what man must offer to God or to the *guru* is not any outer possession, but one's whole being: this total surrender is the goal of *bhakti*.[83] The best commentary on the saint's words are the autobiographical reminiscences reported in the *Shri Sai Satcharita* (chap. 32, vv. 152-68):

> Once, when I was small, stinting on my own needs, I set out in search of a job for my livelihood. As I walked on, I came to Beedgaon, where I rested for a while. But my Fakir [= Allāh][84] had a different plan for me, which brought me great happiness. There I secured a job of doing *'jariwork'* [= embroidering in gold or silver thread]. I worked untiringly and all my toil came to fruition. Such is the power of the Fakir! There were four other

80 The *vakīl*s were native practitioners who were qualified to appear and practice in the High Courts of pre-independence India.

81 *The New English Bible: New Testament*, 11.

82 Edgerton, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, 48.

83 Echoing these sentiments, Sathya Sai Baba (1926-2011) of Puttaparthi used to say: "Money comes and goes, but morality comes and grows"; Gries, Gries, *Sathya Sai Speaks, volumes I-XI*, 127.

84 As noted, Sai Baba would often employ the word *faqīr* to refer to Allāh.

> boys, employed before me and much acclaimed for their skill. They too, were working there, and their work was assessed on completion. One had put in work worth Rs. 50/-; another worth Rs. 100/- and the third one, worth Rs. 150/-. But my work was worth double their amount. Seeing my skill, my employer was very pleased, and being fond of me, praised me highly. He presented me with a dress, consisting of a turban over the head and a '*shela*' [a sort of scarf, pending from the shoulders loosely over the body],[85] to take over the body. But the moment it was given, I just tied it in a bundle and put it away.[86] How can that suffice, which somebody gives you? However much it is, it is always inadequate. But when God gives something, it has no end, even to the end of time. What my Master gives me is real 'giving'. How can anyone else's compare with it, ever? How can the 'limited' lend distinction to the 'boundless'? My Master says, "Take, O take this away!" Everyone says: "Give, give only to me!" (material things). But no one heeds my words. No one listens to me attentively! His treasury is overflowing, but no one cares to bring the carts. Nobody will dig, when asked to do so. No one bothers to make the effort. I say, "Dig for that wealth and carry it away by the cart-loads. Only he will collect the treasure, who is truly his mother's son". And what, after all, is our fate? Dust will return to dust, and the wind, to the wind. And this opportunity, once lost, will never come back again! However, the skill of my Fakir, the *leela* [= play] of my Bhagavan, the harmonious consistency of my Master is something quite different, quite unique! […] Day and night, I keep thinking of my own people.[87] As you sow, so you reap. He who will bear in mind the words I have uttered, will enjoy priceless happiness.[88]

Later in the morning, Khaparde met Mr. Shingne, a High Court Vakil of Bombay, who gave him the latest political news and told him that some political prisoners had been released – news that must have immediately sparked hope for Tilak's release – but unfortunately, "their names etc. are not yet known". Khaparde's discussion with Mr. Shingne about political matters shows how much he was engrossed in such thoughts, confirming "where his heart was". The truth of Sai Baba's words to him became apparent, and the awareness of his lukewarm faith must have caused him a sense of guilt. The fact that he fell asleep after lunch and was "a little late" in reaching the *masjid* for the afternoon meeting with Sai Baba further betrays his inner conflict. At the same time, his prostration or *namaskār* to the saint

85 Apparently, Sai Baba was familiar with the weaving of scarves. In an issue of *Shri Sainathprabha* dated 1918, he is reported to have said: "Our village is towards Pathri Parbhani in Mughlai region, and we have a business of weaving *shela*s (rich scarfs). I was well skilled in weaving and at times would weave 4-4 *shela*s per day and would earn Rs. 100-150" (Satpathy, *An Inspiring Life*, 4).

86 This is reminiscent of the reaction of H.S. Dixit's maidservant when she received a beautiful sari as a gift from Das Ganu. It was precisely after witnessing her reaction that Das Ganu was able to comprehend the meaning of the *Īśā Upaniṣad*, as Sai Baba had foretold; see Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 324-36 (chap. 20). At verse 89 of this chapter, we read: "But the very next day, she [= the maidservant] put the sari away in her bundle of special clothes and wrapped the same old torn rag round herself, but without appearing to be dispirited in any way".

87 See Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 613 (chap. 37, v. 93): "But as for me, I ceaselessly think of you, day and night".

88 Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 528-9.

in the evening was sincere – an implicit call for help, as if he were praying: "I have faith [...] help me where faith falls short" (*Mark* 9:24).[89]

> Shirdi, Friday 15 December 1911
>
> In the morning after prayer I sat talking with Mr. Shingne and Mr. Durvesh Falke. He is also called Hajisaheb.[90] He has travelled to Baghdad, Constantinople and Mecca and all places near about. His conversation is very pleasant and instructive. *Sayin Maharaj likes him very much, sends him food and otherwise treats him with great consideration.*
> *I saw Sayin Maharaj go out and again, at the Masjid, on his return. He was in a very pleasant mood and we all enjoyed his conversation.*
> After meals I lay down for a while and then sat listening to an account of Delhi, read by my son Balvant.
> Then we went to the Masjid, *received the blessings of Sayin Maharaj* and later on went for Shej Arti.

It's interesting that Khaparde didn't feel like asking Sai Baba when he could leave. He just decided to stay and go with the flow of the place. He has nice things to say about Durvesh Haji Mohamad Siddique Phalke, and points out the saint's fondness for him. Evidently, the *faqīr* was pleased with his devotion.

Again, the diarist notes how Sai Baba was in a "pleasant mood" and how everyone at the mosque "enjoyed his conversation", proving the joyful atmosphere that reigned at these meetings and implicitly acknowledging that the saint was a skilful conversationalist.

After lunch, Khaparde listened "to an account of Delhi", which confirms his willingness to stay informed of current political developments.

> Shirdi, Saturday 16 December 1911
>
> I find I have got a severe cold. I could not get up in time for Kakad Arti. I got up at 3 AM and then overslept myself.
> After prayer I sat talking with Durvesh Saheb Falke whom they call Hajisaheb and Hajarat[91] indiscriminately. He is a Karma Margi as we should call him in Hinduism, and has numerous anecdotes to tell.
> *I saw Sayin Maharaj go out and later on after he returned to the Masjid. He was in a very pleasant mood and sat talking and joking.*
> After Arti I returned to our lodging and had food and lay down a while but could not sleep. From Amravati they sent me, besides the *Amrit Bazar Patrika*,[92] two numbers of the *Bombay Advocate*. So there was a good deal to read.
> There was also a telegram offering a Sessions case.[93] Three days ago there was a telegram offering the case at Wardha.

89 *The New English Bible: New Testament,* 74.

90 Honorific title which is given to a Muslim who has successfully completed his pilgrimage (*hajj*) to Mecca.

91 Also Hazrat. A title of respect.

92 One of the oldest daily newspapers in India.

93 A criminal case. The Sessions Court exercises its jurisdiction on criminal matters.

> I declined it as *Sayin Maharaj did not grant permission to return*. About today's telegram, the result was the same. Madhavrao Deshpande asked for permission for me, and *Sayin Maharaj said I might go the day after or a month hence*. So the matter is settled.
> *I saluted him as usual in front of the Chavadi* and after Arti in the Wada sat listening to Bhishma's Bhajan.
> My wife went to a neighbouring village Rahata[94] in the morning for renewing the bangles on her wrist.
> Among the new arrivals today is Mr. Hate who has appeared for LM&S.[95] He is a very nice young man. His father was judge at Amreli and later on Diwan[96] of Palitana. I think I knew his uncle. He is a goldsmith, what they call Daivajna Brahmin.[97]
> I am feeling unwell.

This wasn't a good day for Khaparde since he had a bad cold and didn't feel well. Nonetheless, he managed to follow the daily routine of *darśan*s and meetings with Sai Baba at the mosque. Interestingly, he identifies Durvesh Haji Mohamad Siddique Phalke as a *karmamārgin*, one who cultivates an inner attitude of desireless detachment from the results (*phala*) of his actions, both ritual and social, as Kṛṣṇa teaches Arjuna in the *Bhagavadgītā*. Again, Khaparde points out how in the morning Sai Baba was "in a very pleasant mood" and not only held everyone's rapt attention with what he said but also amused his spellbound audience by telling jokes.

After lunch, the diarist managed to keep himself informed about the political situation and the latest developments in his profession by reading newspapers that were sent to him from his home in Amravati. Though over the last three days he had been offered two legal cases, he had to decline both offers "as Sayin Maharaj did not grant permission to return". Economically, this represented a considerable loss for Khaparde. On the other hand, Sai Baba's word was law for him: when Madhavrao Deshpande tried again to intercede for him, the saint's answer that "he might go the day after or a month hence" definitely "settled the matter".

For an active person like him, who was used to having a full agenda and always being on the move, it must have been hard to sit still and patiently comply with Sai Baba's orders. By keeping him in Shirdi, the *faqīr* wanted him to 'stop doing anything', i.e., to fully surrender to him and learn to lead a contemplative life, redefining his priorities. As noted, Khaparde's devotion was such that he would never have gone against the will of the *faqīr*, since he believed that the latter's word was supreme. Ultimately, he had complete faith that whatever Sai Baba said was "the word of God" and was meant for his own good. The *faqīr*'s prolonged detention of Khaparde is itself a kind of parable, teaching his devotee the most important lesson: the giving up of *tan*, *man*, and *dhan* – i.e., of one's body, mind, and possessions. As Sai Baba taught Nanasaheb Chandorkar while explaining the meaning of *Bhagavadgītā* 4.34:

94 A town to the south of Shirdi, about four miles away. In his youth, Sai Baba would often go to Rahata.

95 Licentiate in Medicine and Surgery, a medical degree.

96 A powerful government official.

97 Native to the Konkan area and mainly found in Goa, Kerala, and coastal Karnataka and Maharashtra, they are a subgroup of *sonar*s, i.e., goldsmiths.

> Where even the great learned ones are deceived, the simple, faithful ones hold their ground, for they have, for ever, surrendered themselves at Hari's feet, while the *Jnani*s suffer from the conceit of their knowledge. Hence to get safely across this *Maya*, hold fast to the Sadguru's feet, surrender to him single-mindedly. And the fear of worldly life will vanish instantly.[98]

> Shirdi, Sunday 17 December 1911
>
> My cold is a little better this morning but not so much, but my health looks worse. Mr. Shingne gave me some soda and acid powder and I put it in milk and drank it. It relieved my bowels and I felt better. My wife is confined to bed on account of pains in the back and legs.
> After prayer *I saw Sayin Maharaj go out and then again after he returned. He was in a very good mood and we enjoyed very much the jokes made by him*. The breakfast was late as Megha Raj had gone out to bring Bel leaves. He came back a little late.
> In the afternoon I sat talking with Hajisaheb Falke, Dr. Hate, Mr. Shingne and others. Gokhale went away today. He has on him and in his general conduct all the indications of a spy. He gave out here that he was a friend of Atre, subjudge of Nagpur.
> Towards evening I went to the Masjid but *Sayin Maharaj asked me and my companions to bow from a distance. He however called my son Balvant near and told him to bring Dakshina. We all saluted him opposite the Chavadi and again at night at Shej Arti*. Tonight Sayin Maharaj sleeps at the Chavadi.

Though the diarist still didn't feel well – and to complicate things, his wife was bedridden – he was able to participate in the daily routine of the place and again pointed out how Sai Baba was "in a very good mood" and that everyone enjoyed "the jokes made by him". The *ārtī* was late due to the fact that Megha, the *śaiva pujārī*, had to go in search of the *bel* leaves outside the village. As a consequence, even the meal was delayed. Sai Baba himself could not have cared less for the *bel* leaves; indeed, he resisted being worshipped and disapproved of the performance of *ārtī*s in his honor. In time, he came to reluctantly tolerate them because of the overwhelming devotion of his Hindu followers.[99] In a first phase, *ārtī*s were intended for individual use only, but starting around 1908, there was a transition from an individual

98 Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 650 (chap. 39, vv. 81-2). See also Narasimhaswami, *Life of Sai Baba*, 2: 88-91.

99 Apparently, the first one to perform *ārtī* to Sai Baba was Tatya Saheb Nulkar, a devotee whom the *faqīr* held in high esteem; see Pradhan, *Shri Sai Baba of Shirdi*, 47-8. It must be underlined that it was because of his *bhakta*s' intense love for him that he condescended to be worshipped, otherwise he would have never allowed anyone to perform *ārtī*s to him. Even in Dabholkar's *Shri Sai Satcharita*, it is clearly said that Sai Baba condescended to be bathed with the water of the Godāvarī (= Gaṅgā) only to satisfy Megha's ardent wish: "Really, Megha! I do not want this bath with the Ganga-water. Oh, how foolish can you be! Why does a fakir like me, want Ganga-water?"; Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 465 (chap. 28, v. 173). And yet, "seeing his [= Megha's] overwhelming love, pure heart and firm resolve, Baba said: 'All right! Let your wish be satisfied!'"; *ibid*., 466 (chap. 28, v. 176). See also *ibid*., 621-3 (chap. 37, vv. 183-4, 187, 203, 205), 806 (chap. 49, v. 119). As the *faqīr* used to say, "I am absolutely in the power of my devotees and stand by their side"; *ibid*., 172 (chap. 11, v. 76). See also *ibid*., 653 (chap. 39, v. 111); *ibid*., 782-3 (chap. 48, vv. 19-20).

form of worship to community worship.[100] The regular congregational *pūjā* is conventionally said to have been established beginning on 10 December 1909, with the onset of the *cāvaḍī* procession and the celebration of the *śej ārtī*.[101]

It is noteworthy that Khaparde was convinced that Mr. Gokhale – who had arrived in Shirdi a week earlier, on 10 December – was not a devotee of Sai Baba but a British spy sent to monitor him and possibly even Sai Baba. Khaparde was probably right, given that over the years he had learned to recognize this kind of person. Mr. Gokhale, whom Khaparde noticed sang very nicely, had told him that he was a friend of a sub-judge from Nagpur, that he had come to Shirdi from Narsoba Wadi (a center of Dattātreya worship), and that after visiting Sai Baba he would be visiting the saint Narayan Maharaj of Kedgaon. Evidently, Khaparde was convinced that this was all a cover story and must have been relieved when Gokhale finally left Shirdi.

It is significant that when he and other devotees went to the mosque in the evening, Sai Baba asked them to "bow from a distance". He did not allow them inside but told them to perform *namaskār* and leave. He did, however, call Khaparde's son, asking him to bring *dakṣiṇā*; Balvant must have obeyed instantly, likely obtaining the money from his father. To be sure, there were times when the saint wished to be left alone, and this was one of them. Given the constant influx of devotees coming for his *darśan*, it must not have been easy for him to safeguard his privacy.

> Shirdi, Monday 18 December 1911
>
> My throat is better today than it was yesterday.
> After prayer I sat talking with Mr. Shingne, Wamanrao Patel, and Durvesh Saheb whose full name would appear to be Durvesh Haji Mahomed Saddik of Kalyan.
> *I saw Sayin Saheb go out and later went to the Masjid when he returned. He said I had filled my bucket, was enjoying the cool breezes of the Nim tree and was enjoying myself while he was enduring all manner of trouble and had no sleep. He was in a very pleased mood* and many people came to worship. My wife also came.
> We returned after midday Arti and after meals sat talking with Hajisaheb, Bapusaheb Jog and others.
> Towards evening we went to Masjid and *sat near Sayin Saheb* but there was not much time as it was approaching evening. *So he gave us leave and we stood in front of the Chavadi and as usual saluted him there*. Returning to our lodging I sat listening to Bhishma's Bhajan.
> PS: An employee of Central Press came today with his wife and daughter. He said he had seen me before in Bombay and again at the Poona Railway Station when I went with all my

100 See Rigopoulos, *Life and Teachings*, 140-1. As a token of his blessings, Sai Baba sent an *ārtī* composed by the devotee Madhavrao Adkar to Nanasaheb Chandorkar; see Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 538-40 (chap. 33, vv. 77-82). On Madhavrao Adkar and his *ārtī*, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GyHY3_uHwVU ("The Aarti Blessed by Sri Sai Baba Himself… 'Arti Sai Baba…'"). Apparently, this was the *faqīr*'s favorite *ārtī*: "Baba asked Shama to send it through Ram Giri Bua to Maina Tai as mentioned in chapter 33 of the *Charita*. This *Arati* must have been written between 1903 and 1904. […] It's sung at the noon and evening *Arati*'s in Shirdi, and if there is one *Arati* that is sung all over the world it is this *Arati*"; Chitluri, *Baba's Divine Symphony*, 54. Besides confirming Sai Baba's love for music, this incident shows that the *faqīr* allowed and even encouraged his Hindu devotees to worship him through the practice of *ārtī*s.

101 See Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 70 (chap. 4, v. 165), 615 (chap. 37, v. 118).

> family for the wedding of my third son.[102] He appeared to be a very nice man and devotionally inclined. He came today and *Sayin Maharaj gave him permission to return* and he returned accordingly. Govind Rao Gandagole of Bassein came with him and is naturally staying with me. He came from Akola without going to Amravati. He is alone and nobody is with him.

Sai Baba, who was "in a very pleased mood", assured Khaparde of his fatherly love – that is, of the fact that he was taking full care of him. While the saint had to undergo all sorts of troubles, even sacrificing his sleep to protect him from his enemies, his 'son' could relax and enjoy himself "in the cool breeze of the *nīm* tree",[103] having "filled his bucket"[104] to the brim. The holy man regarded this as his mission: to protect his devotees from all evils. The fact that the day before the saint had asked Khaparde's son Balvant to bring him *dakṣiṇā*, was possibly the *faqīr*'s way of pointing out that he and his family ought to reciprocate his protective grace with a symbolic offer. On one occasion, he specified that it was "the Presiding Goddess of this *Mashidmayee* (mosque) who asked for her dues".[105] Sai Baba's kind words to Khaparde at the mosque – when his wife, who evidently felt better, was also present – were meant to confirm that his days in Shirdi were a time of grace, not of detention, and that he should leave everything to him, making the best use of this propitious occasion by 'doing nothing'. Indeed, only detachment is said to bring about peace (*śānti*).[106]

It is noteworthy that Khaparde, along with others, was able to "sit near Sayin Saheb" at the mosque. This means that devotees were allowed to sit close to the saint, possibly encircling him, so that there was very little distance between him and the assembly of *bhakta*s. With evening approaching, however, Sai Baba soon gave them leave, and therefore Khaparde and all others "stood in front of the Chavadi and as usual saluted him there".

> Shirdi, Tuesday 19 December 1911
>
> In the morning I got up early, felt fresh, prayed and felt that I was better all round. *Sayin Maharaj went out* while I was yet praying so I could not see him.
> Later on I went to the Masjid and *found him in a very pleasant mood*. ***He said there was a rich man who had five sons and a daughter. These children effected a division of the family property. Four of the sons took their shares of movables and immovables. The fifth son and the daughter could not take possession of their share. They wandered about hungry, came to Sayin Baba. They had six carts laden with jewels. Robbers took away two of the six carts. The remaining four were kept under the Banyan tree. At this point Trimbakrao, whom Baba calls Maruti, interrupted and the story ran in a different channel.***

102 Khaparde's youngest son Bhausaheb.

103 It should be noted that "to breathe the air through the neam-trees" is thought to be "very conducive to health"; Hassan Ali, *Mussulmauns of India*, 309.

104 The metaphor of the bucket implies that when it is full one is happy and content, while when it is empty one is unfulfilled.

105 Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 591 (chap. 36, v. 23).

106 See *Bhagavadgītā* 12.12. On *śānti*, see Rigopoulos, "Anelito alla pace nell'induismo", 31-69.

> After the midday Arti I returned to the lodging, had food and sat talking with Durvesh Saheb. He is a very pleasant man. Waman Rao Patel went away today. He never [said] much as [he] came to us to say goodbye. Ram Maruti Bua came in the afternoon. He danced and jumped about a good deal during Bhajan. *We saw Sayin Maharaj in the evening and again at Shej Arti time.* Ram Maruti Bua attended Bhishma's Bhajan and danced and jumped. *Sayin Baba this afternoon went out towards Nimgaon, visited Dengle, cut a tree and came back. Many went after him with musical instruments and escorted him home.* I did not go far. Radhakrishna Bai came near our Wada *to greet Sayin Saheb* and I saw her for the first time without the big veil on.

When he awoke, Khaparde was pleased to find that he felt perfectly well. In the morning, he went as usual to the *masjid* and "found Sai Baba in a very pleasant mood". The saint then began narrating a tale to the assembled devotees – a story that appears highly symbolic and in which he himself once again figures as the protagonist. The six children of a rich father – who may be interpreted as God – divide the family property in order to gain independence. However, while four of them take possession of both movable and immovable goods, the fifth son and the daughter – the youngest and purest – are unable to claim their share, apparently having been deprived of it by their four greedy brothers, who appropriate everything. Left in dire straits, the two wander about hungry until they finally come to Sai Baba, who appears as their savior. The narrative seems to suggest that he takes care of them, feeding them and offering them shelter. [107] As expressed in the seventy-third among Sai Baba's 108 names, he is the protector of the unprotected and the friend of the poor (*anāthanātha dīnabandhu*).[108]

The episode may be read as conveying that anyone, male or female, who has been unjustly treated can turn to him, for he acts as the representative of God and His justice – symbolized by the rich father, who is always at the side of his children, especially those in need. Thus, what initially appears as misfortune ultimately becomes the salvation of the two siblings, who come under his care. As Sai Baba had told Khaparde the previous year, on 9 December 1910, when the latter was impatient to leave Shirdi: "This [= the *masjid*] is our house. The Wada is our house, and why need anybody be afraid while I am here? This is our house and you should look upon it as your own house".[109]

The four greedy brothers now possess "six carts laden with jewels", that is, one cart each – their original share – together with the two additional carts taken from their brother and sister. [110] Blinded by greed, they no longer show concern for the fate of their own kin, and the narrative appears

107 See Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 380 (chap. 23, v. 110). Hindus, who typically identify Sai Baba as an *avatāra*, are reminded of Kṛṣṇa's solemn declaration in *Bhagavadgītā* 4.8: "For protection of the good, and for destruction of evil-doers, to make a firm footing for the right, I come into being in age after age"; Edgerton, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, 23.

108 See Rigopoulos, *Life and Teachings*, xv.

109 *Shirdi Diary of the Hon'ble Mr. Ganesh Shrikrishna Khaparde, Advocate, Umraoti*, http://saiamrithadhara.com/docs/G.%20S.%20Khaparde%20Diary.pdf.pdf. See also *Shirdi Diary of the Hon'ble Mr. G.S. Khaparde*, 6.

110 In the sentence "They had six carts laden with jewels", 'they' must refer to the four brothers; otherwise, the story would not make sense.

to stress that the craving for material wealth leads to various forms of wrongdoing and distances human beings from God, ultimately bringing about their ruin. Robbers then enter the scene – the accumulation of wealth inevitably attracting them – and steal two of the brothers' six carts, thereby taking from them what they had previously taken from their siblings. In this way, the saint seems to underscore the inexorable law of *karma*, or divine justice: what has been unjustly appropriated is in turn taken away. The remaining four carts of jewels must be "kept under the Banyan tree", hidden away for fear of losing even their rightful share. In Indian lore, fabulous treasures are often said to lie beneath trees, in subterranean realms.

Finally, the four brothers find themselves completely alone: their riches, concealed beneath the Banyan tree, can no longer benefit them. Indeed, they may be said to have become slaves to their jewels, which constitute both a heavy burden and a constant source of anxiety. Collectively, the four brothers represent ignorance and greed – possibly corresponding to the ego-complex comprising *manas, buddhi, citta,* and *ahaṃkāra*[111] – whereas the youngest brother and the sister may be seen as representing the pure soul (*jīva/śiva*) and its inseparable *śakti*, ultimately rescued by Sai Baba. It is unfortunate that, owing to a devotee's interruption, this captivating tale "ran in a different channel".

Interestingly, Bharadwaja puts forward a quite different interpretation of it:

> The father is ego or *jiva*. The five sons are the five senses. Mind is the daughter. Fifth son is the sense of smell, i.e. breath. The rest of the four senses are attached to their objects. Mind and breath which are perturbed had both sought Baba's soccour. Yet the jewel-laden carts were stolen by the weakness of the other senses. The passions associated with the other senses are the robbers. The jewel-laden carts symbolize the six aspects of *sadhana* or *sadhana shatka*.[112] Banyan tree symbolizes *samsara*, the perennial tree of phenomenal manifestation. The parable shows that it is not enough if only a few senses of the seeker and a few of his passions are under control.[113]

Nimgaon is located about two miles north of Shirdi. Both Nanasaheb and his elder brother, Babasaheb Dengle, a local landowner (*jāgīrdār*), were devotees of Sai Baba from the early days, when he led a solitary life, as most people in Shirdi disregarded him or looked upon him with contempt, some even considering him mad (*pāgal*). Nanasaheb Dengle is said to have been the first *bhakta* to be blessed with offspring by the *faqīr*; as a result, his fame as a miracle-worker began to spread.[114] The saint probably cut a

111 See Narasimhaswami, *Devotees' Experiences*, 261-2. For the symbolism of the number four as representing the ego-complex of *manas*, *buddhi*, *citta*, and *ahaṃkāra*, see also Chitluri, *Baba's Rinanubandh*, 59.

112 The six fundamental virtues are: equanimity (*sama*), sense control (*dama*), renunciation (*uparati*), patience or fortitude (*titikṣa*), concentration (*samādhāna*), and faith (*śraddhā*). According to Vedānta, these virtues constitute one of the four indispensable qualifications that a *sādhaka* must possess, together with the desire for liberation (*mumukṣutva*), the capacity to discriminate between the real and the unreal (*nityānityavastuviveka*), and dispassion or detachment (*ihāmutraphalabhogavirāga*); see Rigopoulos, *Life and Teachings*, 278, 314-15.

113 Bharadwaja, *Sai Baba the Master*, 93.

114 See Rigopoulos, *Life and Teachings*, 69, 74 fn. 32, 77 fn. 78, 114.

tree in order to use its wood as fuel for the sacred fire (*dhunī*) that he kept perpetually burning inside the mosque. From his early years, he would sit and silently contemplate the *dhunī* for hours, both by day and by night. The fact that many accompanied him to Nimgaon with musical instruments and escorted him back to Shirdi shows the veneration in which he was held: he was, as it were, taken in procession and worshipped as a deity to the accompaniment of music.[115] Khaparde, however, "did not go far", that is, he followed Sai Baba only as far as the outskirts of Shirdi and then chose to return to his lodging, possibly because he felt that the saint's privacy ought to be respected and that it was not appropriate to follow him further.

> Shirdi, Wednesday 20 December 1911
>
> I got up very early in the morning and went to Kakad Arti. Towards the close of the Arti I noticed Waman Rao there with surprise and learnt that he, on the way near Kopargaon, sent the driver of his cart to purchase guavas and the bullocks ran away. He wandered about, was taken hold of by the Police and had a good deal of trouble. The story was very laughable.
> *Sayin Maharaj left Chavadi without any audible remark except that Allah is the lord of all.*
> I returned to our lodging, prayed, and *saw Sayin Maharaj go out and again on his return to Masjid. He was in a very pleased mood. Durvesh Saheb told me that Sayin Baba saw him at night and granted his wish. I mentioned this to Sayin Maharaj and he said nothing. I today shampooed the legs of Sayin Maharaj. The softness of his limbs is wonderful.*
> Our meal was somewhat late. After it, I sat reading the papers received today. There are letters from Miss Campbell and Miss Willis.[116]
> Towards evening I went to Masjid, *received Sayin Baba's blessing, saluted him in front of Chavadi* and returned to my lodging. We had Bhishma's Bhajan attended by Ram Maruti Baba and Ramayan[117] read by Dixit.

The fact that Waman Rao Patel had an accident near Kopargaon and was forced to return to Shirdi after "a good deal of trouble" – an incident that elicited laughter from Khaparde and other devotees – was interpreted as the consequence of his having left the village without seeking Sai Baba's permission.

Khaparde's remark that "Sayin Maharaj left Chavadi without any audible remark except that Allah is the lord of all" is noteworthy. As noted, the saint did not speak much and, like most ascetics, would speak only when addressed. One source reports that "Baba never sat and indulged in idle gossip as it usually happens in small villages. He spoke very little and that too if there was

115 See Pradhan, *Shri Sai Baba of Shirdi*, 42.

116 Miss Eva Willis served as Bipin Chandra Pal's secretary in London; see https://gazetteers.maharashtra.gov.in/cultural.maharashtra.gov.in/english/gazetteer/VOL-VII/PAGE_152_201.pdf.

117 Presumably, this refers to Vālmīki's Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa* rather than Eknāth's Marāṭhī *Bhāvārth Rāmāyaṇ*. On the following day, Khaparde notes that in the afternoon he sat reading the "Bhavarth Ramayan", while in the evening Dixit read the "Ramayan" during their regular gathering at Dixit's *vāḍā*.

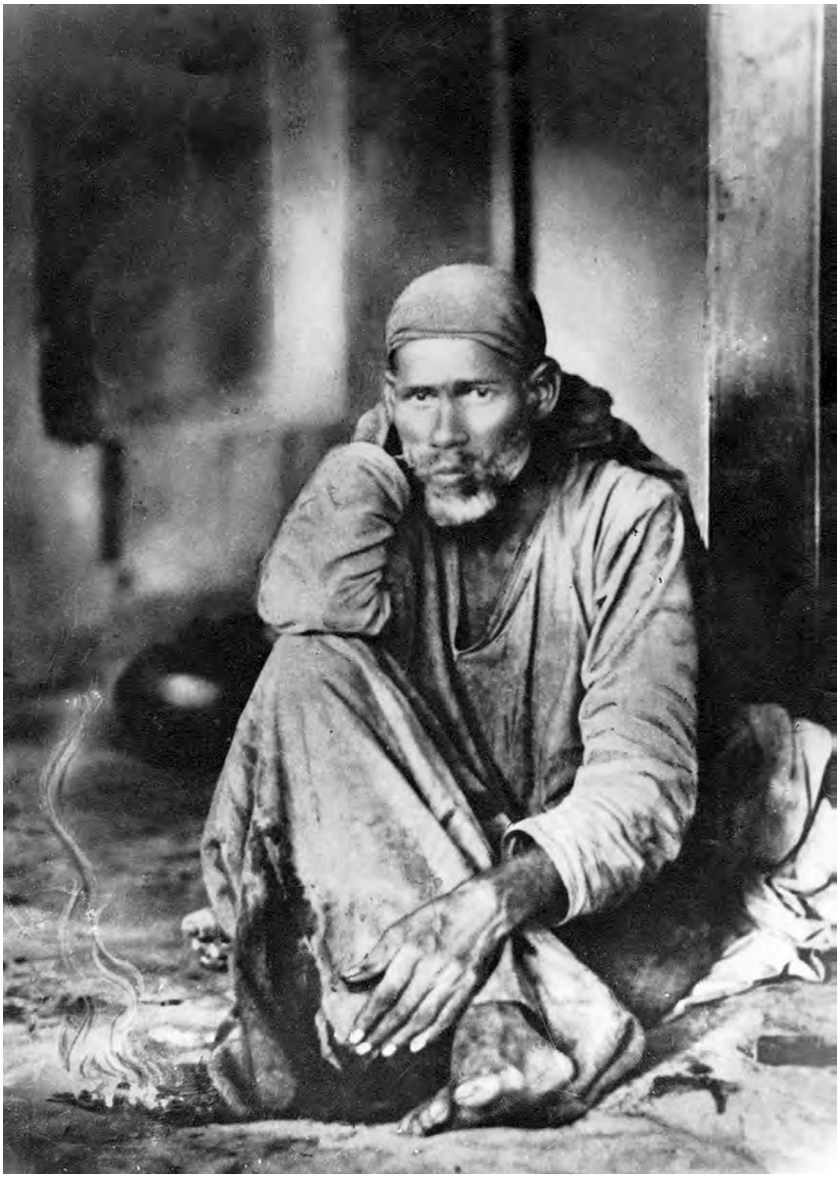

Figure 32 Sai Baba near his ever-burning fire in the mosque. This photograph was taken by Kashinath Krishnaji Gode in 1903

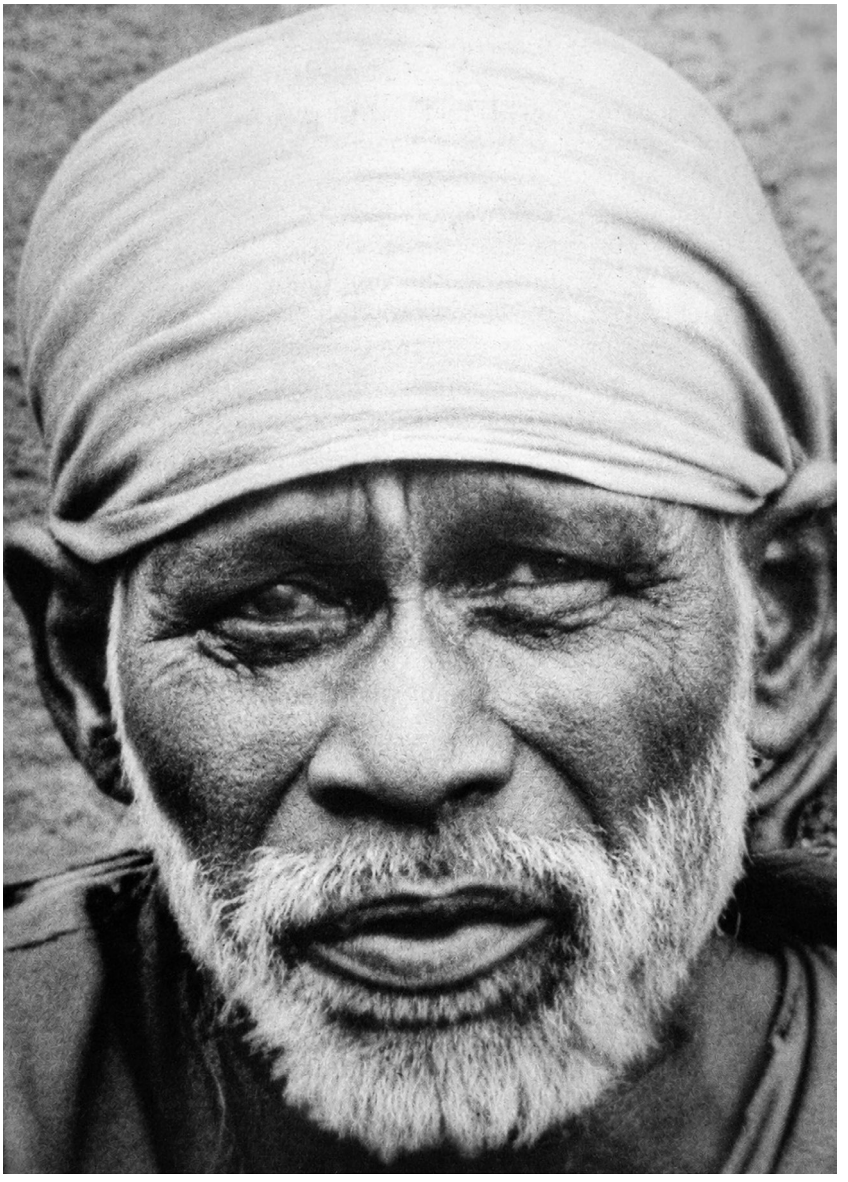

Figure 33 Sai Baba

a reason to do so. […] [T]hough he was old, his voice was very powerful and his diction was clear up to his Maha Samadhi".[118] The *faqīr* often remained silent, sometimes for prolonged periods, exerting his influence through his sheer presence, his gaze, and his gestures. The village elders whom I interviewed in October 1985 told me that being in his presence was akin to being in the presence of God. Silent *darśan* is believed to possess transformative power in its own right, opening the hearts and minds of devotees to the intuitive realization of ultimate reality. Sai Baba's silence (*mauna*), therefore, was understood as profoundly eloquent, conveying a tangible experience of the sacred.[119] In this regard, the testimony of Morarji Desai (1896-1995), the fourth Prime Minister of India – who visited Sai Baba in 1917 as a student – is highly significant. During their exchange, when Desai asked about the essence of religion, Sai Baba replied with a single word: "Silence". When asked how it might be attained, he answered: "Dhyan" [meditation]. To the final question of what Dhyan was, Sai Baba simply repeated: "Silence".[120]

At the same time, we know that the saint practiced the continuous repetition – *dhikr* – of the phrase *Allāh Mālik* ('Allāh is the master' or 'possessor of the kingdom'), one of the ninety-nine names of Allāh in the Islāmic tradition,[121] as a constant reminder of His universal glory and sovereignty. Khaparde's note that his only audible remark was "Allāh is the lord of all"[122] may be interpreted as indicating that he either uttered the words *Allāh Mālik* or some similar phrase.[123]

Once again, the diarist notes that at the morning meeting in the mosque Sai Baba was in "a very pleased mood". He then ventured to ask him about what Durvesh Haji Mohamad Siddique Phalke had told him, that is, whether it was true that "Sayin Baba saw him at night and granted his wish", possibly

118 Chitluri, *Baba's Divine Symphony,* 37-8. Apparently, Sai Baba had a thunderous voice even in his old age; see *ibid*., 224.

119 See Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 495 (chap. 30, vv. 87-8).

120 Bhattacharya, *The Divine Resurrection*, 1: 213. On Morarji Desai, see Singh, *Morarji Desai*.

121 This corresponds to the eighty-fourth (*Mālik al-mulk*), or even the fourth (*al-Malik*), of the ninety-nine names of Allāh. For an evaluation, see Rigopoulos, *Life and Teachings*, 293-7. For a commentary on these two names in the Sufi tradition, see 'Abd al-Karīm Al-Ǧīlī, *Nomi divini e Profeta*, 99, 147. See also Scarabel, *Preghiera sui Nomi più belli*, 110, 136-7. On God as king in a comparative perspective, see *Exodus* 15:18 ("The Lord reigns for ever and ever"); *Psalm* 22:28 ("For dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations"); *Psalm* 103:19 ("The Lord has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all"). In both Hebrew and Arabic, the terms for king and kingdom derive from root *mlk*, 'to reign', 'to possess'. Forms of this root recur more than 3,000 times in the Old Testament; see Soggin, "מֶלֶךְ *melek* king", 2: 672-80. See also Ravasi, *L'alfabeto di Dio*, 100-2. On Jesus' parables of the kingdom, see Getty-Sullivan, *Parables of the Kingdom*.

122 In Sanskrit, that is, from a Hindu standpoint, the literal translation of 'lord of all' is Viśveśvara.

123 A Hindu parallel is found in a saying attributed to saint Ramakrishna dated 16 October 1883: "'He [= God] is the Master, and the universe and all its living beings belong to Him' – that is Knowledge. […] As long as you do not feel that God is the Master, you must come back to the world, you must be born again and again. There will be no rebirth when you can truly say, 'O God, Thou art the Master'"; Gupta, *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, 341. A contemporary Hindu hagiography interprets *Allāh Mālik* as meaning 'Śiva-Śakti is the Master': "In *Sreepada Sreevallabha Charitamrutam* the meaning of 'Allaha Malik' is described beautifully in chapter 45. Sreepada Sreevallabha states, 'In Arabic, *Aal* means *Shakti* and *Aha* means *Shakta* or one who possesses the energy, that is, *Shakti*. Therefore, 'Allaha' means the form of Shiva and Shakti, thus the word Allaha is acceptable to the Muslims also. Malik means the master'" (Chitluri, *Baba's Divine Symphony*, 175).

referring to a vision or a vivid dream he had experienced; however, the *faqīr* remained silent and made no comment.

Khaparde further notes that he was given the honor of shampooing the saint's legs. This was a much-coveted service among Hindu *bhakta*s and the *faqīr* graciously granted him this privilege again on the following day – yet another indication of Khaparde's intimacy with Sai Baba and of his intense devotion.[124]

With regard to the daily routine in Shirdi, it appears that the evening singing of *bhajan*s and the recitation and exposition of sacred texts were practices open to all, and Sai Baba no doubt encouraged his Hindu devotees to participate in such spiritual gatherings (*satsaṅg*).

> Shirdi, Thursday 21 December 1911
>
> I got up as usual, prayed, and sat talking with Durvesh Saheb. He said he had a vision in which he saw three girls and a blind woman knock at his door. He asked them who they were and they replied that they had come to amuse themselves. Thereupon he ordered them out on pain of being kicked and began a prayer. The girls and the old woman ran away on hearing the words of the prayer. He then blessed all in the room and in the house and the whole village. He asked me to ask Sayin Saheb.
> *When I went to see the latter on his return to the Masjid, and before I was fairly seated,* ***Sayin Saheb commenced a story. He said he was bitten last night by something on his private parts and hands, that he applied oil, wandered about, had a stool, and then felt better near the fire.***
> *I shampooed his legs and on my return told the story to Durvesh Saheb.* The answer was clear.
> After the midday Arti, I sat reading Bhavarth Ramayan[125] and then *later on saw Sayin Saheb near the Chavadi, and later on again at Shej Arti at Chavadi.*
> Then we had Bhishma's Bhajan and Ram Maruti's gesticulations. Later still, Mr. Dixit read Ramayan.

The *faqīr*'s story may be read as a symbolic response to the vision of Durvesh Haji Mohamad Siddique Phalke. As Khaparde observes, Sai Baba begins narrating his tale even "before he was fairly seated", a detail that reinforces his reputation as an omniscient being (*sarvajña*) who is already aware of his devotee's inner experience. Within this interpretive framework, the three girls in Durvesh Saheb's vision can plausibly be understood as embodiments of sensual temptation – above all lust – which blinds and enslaves, ultimately leading to spiritual ruin. Such a reading finds support in broader South Asian religious imagery, for instance in the well-known account of Māra's daughters – Taṇhā ('Desire'), Rāga ('Lust'), and Arati ('Discontent') – who attempt to distract the future Buddha from attaining enlightenment.

124 On the softness of Sai Baba's feet, said to have the fragrance of sandalwood, see Chitluri, *Baba's Divine Symphony*, 31, 41.

125 The Marāṭhī rendering of the Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa* by the poet-saint Eknāth, which he began in his late years and left unfinished in the 45th chapter of the 6th *kāṇḍa*. In the *Bhāvārth Rāmāyaṇ*, Eknāth proves his excellence as a narrative poet, offering a rare combination of literary beauty, mystical depth, and socio-political consciousness.

In a similar vein, the blind old woman who accompanies the girls may be interpreted as a personification of ignorance (*avidyā*) or *māyā*,[126] the delusive force that enables and sustains such temptations. This association gains further plausibility when considered alongside Kabīr's poetic imagery, in which *māyā* is at times depicted as an old and unattractive woman,[127] suggesting both deception and decay beneath an illusory allure.

Durvesh Saheb's reaction within the vision is equally significant. His threat to drive the women away, followed by his recourse to prayer, signals a conscious act of resistance. The immediate flight of the figures upon hearing his invocation underscores the perceived efficacy of devotional practice. It is reasonable to suppose that the prayer is directed to Sai Baba, and that the narrative which follows presents itself as a response to that appeal. In this sense, the episode reflects a familiar devotional motif: the saint as one who hears the unspoken plea of the devotee and intervenes without delay.

Khaparde's remark that "the answer was clear" suggests that the *faqīr*'s story was understood, at least by contemporaries, as providing the key to the vision. Building on this, one may interpret Sai Baba's narrative as dramatizing the process of confronting and overcoming the very forces that threatened Durvesh Saheb. The striking detail that "last night he was bitten by something on his private parts and hands" may be read, albeit cautiously, as an allusion to a violent encounter with disruptive, possibly erotic, impulses. Similarly, the application of oil to the affected parts can be understood symbolically as a healing or protective act, suggestive of a divine remedy that alleviates the disturbance.

Other elements of the account admit a comparable, though necessarily tentative, symbolic reading. The saint's statements that he "wandered about" and "had a stool" may be taken to indicate a process of expulsion or release, that is, the purging of harmful or impure influences. Finally, his remark that he "felt better near the fire" of the *dhunī* can be interpreted as signifying restoration through proximity to a sacred source of transformative power. In this light, the fire of the *dhunī* stands in contrast to the destructive 'fire' of lust: the latter is not denied but rather transmuted, its force reduced to ash (*udī*/*vibhūti*), a substance that in Sai Baba's practice itself becomes a vehicle of blessing.

Taken together, these elements support the view that Sai Baba's narrative does not merely explain the vision but reenacts its resolution on a symbolic level. Without overstating the case, it seems plausible to suggest that the saint is presented as assuming an active role in neutralizing the devotee's temptation, thereby reaffirming his function as both protector and spiritual guide.

Shirdi, Friday 22 December 1911

I got up early in the morning to go to Kakad Arti, but in consequence of a remark made by Madhavrao Deshpande I thought of not going but later on Madhavrao himself went and I accompanied him. *Sayin Maharaj was particularly pleasant looking and went quietly to Masjid.*
We all saluted him when he went out and again after he returned to the Masjid. Shingne and Durvesh Saheb made an

126 The veil of illusion is what is known as *ḥijāb* among Sufis; see Ventura, *Sapienza sufi*, 124-5.

127 See Mishra, *Mistici indiani medievali*, 42, 265, 267.

> attempt to go today but *Sayin Maharaj did not grant them the necessary permission*.
> Durvesh Saheb got ill and had fever. Dr. Hate treated him. I think I have mentioned before that there is one Tipnis staying here with his wife. She is ill and Dr. Hate has been doing all he can for her. Ram Maruti Maharaj is also here for her. She had a fit in the evening, but it turned out to be an obsession.
> Dixit, Madhavrao Deshpande and others went to see her. She is possessed by the former owner of the house in which she lives and by two Mahars. The owner declared that he would have killed her but that Sayin Baba ordered him not to. The Mahars are also kept away by Sayin Baba. When Tipnis threatened to move his wife to this Wada the spirits prayed earnestly and asked him not to do so. The spirits said Sayin Baba would beat them.
> There was Bhishma's Bhajan as usual and later on Ramayan by Dixit, a little before midnight.

From the outset, Khaparde once again notes that "Sayin Maharaj was particularly pleasant looking", suggesting that, in the early morning, he appeared to be in a serene and gracious mood. He also records that he "went quietly to the *masjid*", that is, he remained silent, uttering no word.

Khaparde observes that both Mr. Shingne and Durvesh Saheb were not granted permission to leave, even though they "made an attempt to go today". As is well known, the saint would often withhold permission from his devotees to depart, and Khaparde may have taken some comfort in the shared inconvenience. Moreover, the fact that Durvesh Saheb fell ill on the very day he intended to leave carries a certain irony.

Khaparde's observations on the illness of Mr. Tipnis's wife, who had given birth to a son on 6 December, are particularly noteworthy. The woman, who suffered from fits and was treated without apparent success by an allopathic doctor, Dr. Hate, and possibly also by an exorcist, Ram Maruti Maharaj, is described as being "possessed by the former owner of the house in which she lives and by two Mahars", namely, two individuals belonging to an untouchable caste.[128] From a modern perspective, she may have been suffering from a mental disorder, and childbirth may have exacerbated her condition. The fact that her husband brought her to Shirdi likely reflects the belief that the *faqīr* had the power to heal her.

In Maharashtra, there exist several types of centers for the treatment of spirit possession (*bhūtbādhā*), and it is noteworthy that these are often associated with forms of religiosity that stand somewhat apart from mainstream Brāhmaṇical Hinduism.[129] These include Mahānubhāv temples, the tombs (*dargā*s) and memorials (*chilla*s) of Muslim holy men (*pīr*s), and the temples of integrative deities such as Dattātreya and Kāl Bhairav.[130] In the present case, Hindu devotees appear to have been confident that Sai Baba

128 The Mahārs are the largest among the untouchable castes of Maharashtra, whose hereditary work is regarded as utterly impure. They are required to remove the dead cattle from the village and sweep the streets; see Wankhede, "The Mahars and Dalit Movement", 502-13; Padole, Rajani, "The Mahars", 39-45.

129 On possession, see Smith, *The Self Possessed*.

130 See Rigopoulos, *The Mahānubhāvs*, 82-5. On the emergence of the Mahānubhāvs and of a new vernacular literature in 13th-century Maharashtra, see Novetzke, *The Quotidian Revolution*; Feldhaus, *The Mahānubhāva Sūtra-pāṭha*.

would be able to free Mrs. Tipnis from the spirits believed to torment – and even threaten – their host. Interestingly, Khaparde notes that the spirits themselves were said to resist the husband's attempt to move his wife – and, by implication, themselves – to the Dixit *vāḍā*, since in such a case "Sayin Baba would beat them", the *vāḍā* being closer to the mosque, from which his power was believed to emanate.

> Shirdi, Saturday 23 December 1911
>
> I got up early enough in the morning but fell asleep again and then got up very late.
> In coming down, I found that Shingne, his wife and Durvesh Saheb had obtained their permission to return to their homes. So they left, the former to Bombay and the latter to Kalyan. *Durvesh Saheb is obviously very much advanced spiritually as Sayin Maharaj came as far as the breach in the wall to see him off.* I miss him very much as we used to have long talks.
> Mr. Maruti, Solicitor of Bombay, came yesterday with his family, four brothers and a number of children. He is a very nice man and we sat talking. Mr. Mahajani, whom I met last year, came today and brought very good fruit and globes of glass for Sayin Baba's lamps. Mr. Govardhandas of Bhayandar is also here. He brought very good fruit, silk curtains for Sayin Maharaj's improved room in the Chavadi and new dresses for volunteers who carry the umbrella, *chamars*[131] and fans. He is said to be a very rich man.
> There was a little meaningless disagreement between Madhavrao Deshpande and my wife and my son, about living in Dixit's Wada. *Sayin Baba said that the Wada belonged to himself and neither to Dixit nor to Madhavrao.* So the matter settled itself.
> I could not see Sayin Maharaj go out but *paid my respects on his return to Masjid. He gave me fruit and smoke out of his chillim.*
> In the afternoon I had a little sleep after meals and then sat reading the daily newspapers received today. Tilak's release is mentioned as settled but there are no indications of it yet. The new arrivals from Bombay can give no further news. Waman Rao Patel has passed his L.L.B. I wish Dr. Hate had passed also. *Sayin Maharaj says he will get very good news.*
> Tipnis has changed his lodgings and his wife is better. She is not so restless as she used to be. Ram Maruti Bua is still here.
> We went to Shej Arti. The procession was very impressive and the new curtains and dresses looked very nice. I enjoyed it very much. What a pity I have it not in my power to make rich presents of the kind. God is great.
> At night Bhishma had his Bhajan and Dixit read Ramayan.

The morning news was that Mr. Shingne, his wife, and Durvesh Haji Mohamad Siddique Phalke were given permission to return home. Khaparde infers that "Durvesh Saheb is obviously very much advanced spiritually", since he saw

131 Yak-tail whisks utilized as a symbol of honor.

the *faqīr* accompany him up to the gate in the mosque courtyard – something he rarely did, which seems to confirm the saint's affection for him.

Khaparde writes of a "little meaningless disagreement" between Madhavrao Deshpande and his wife and son regarding their stay in the Dixit *vāḍā*, and how Sai Baba settled it by declaring that the *vāḍā* "belonged to himself and neither to Dixit nor to Madhavrao". This spacious pilgrims' lodge, inaugurated only nine months earlier, had been built with the saint's explicit consent and blessings. Dixit regarded its construction as an opportunity to serve his *guru* and accommodate the growing number of visitors. Sai Baba's statement that the *vāḍā* "belonged to himself" may be understood as indicating that it was intended for all his children, that is, his devotees – his only cherished 'possession'. It seems probable that Khaparde's wife and son were not staying in the same room as him: it is a common rule in *ashram*s that men and women, even when married, live separately in order to focus on spiritual practice and avoid sexual distraction. Khaparde is keen to emphasize the *faqīr*'s graciousness toward him, noting that he blessed him with fruit as *prasād* and with smoke from his own clay pipe.

The diarist had always kept Tilak's fate in mind, and the day's news that his release was "settled", albeit with "no indications of it yet", immediately rekindled his hopes. In the afternoon, he even asked some newcomers from Bombay whether they had any further information. As we know, however, this hope would again be disappointed: matters were not settled, and Tilak would be released from prison only in June 1914.

Khaparde further notes that during the afternoon meeting at the *masjid*, Sai Baba anticipated that Dr. Hate would receive "very good news", which was taken to mean that he would obtain his degree. Moreover, Khaparde's remark that Mr. Tipnis had "changed his lodgings" and that his wife felt better seems to suggest that they had moved to the Dixit *vāḍā* and that the spirits believed to possess her had been "beaten up" by Sai Baba.[132]

Khaparde's comments on the improvements in the *cāvaḍī*'s décor are also noteworthy, including the addition of new "silk curtains" and the increasingly elaborate evening procession, with "new dresses for volunteers who carry the umbrella, *chamar*s and fans". These arrangements were made by a certain Mr. Govardhandas, described as "a very rich man". Another devotee, Mr. Mahajani, contributed "globes of glass for Sayin Baba's lamps". Sai Baba was evidently not pleased with such luxuries, as they stood in contrast to his *faqīr*-like way of life.[133] He appears, however, to have tolerated them – albeit reluctantly – out of regard for the sincere devotion of his Hindu *bhakta*s. Particularly striking is Khaparde's remark that "he had it not in his power to make rich presents of the kind", which suggests that he himself was facing financial difficulties. It would likely have been his heartfelt wish to offer Sai Baba such gifts, but he could not afford to do so. His final statement – "God is great" – was inspired both by the beauty and grandeur of the evening procession and by Sai Baba's own habit of uttering *Allāh Mālik*.

132 See Narasimhaswami, *Charters and Sayings*, 197.

133 As the great Bhartṛhari (5th century CE) portrays the ascetic in his *Vairāgyaśataka* (94): "The earth is his vast bed, the arms his ample pillow, the sky is his canopy, the genial breeze his fan, the autumnal moon is his lamp, and rejoicing in the company of abnegation as his wife, the sage lies down happily and peacefully, like a monarch of undiminished glory" (Swami Madhavananda, *Vairāgya-śatakam of Bhartṛhari*, 56).

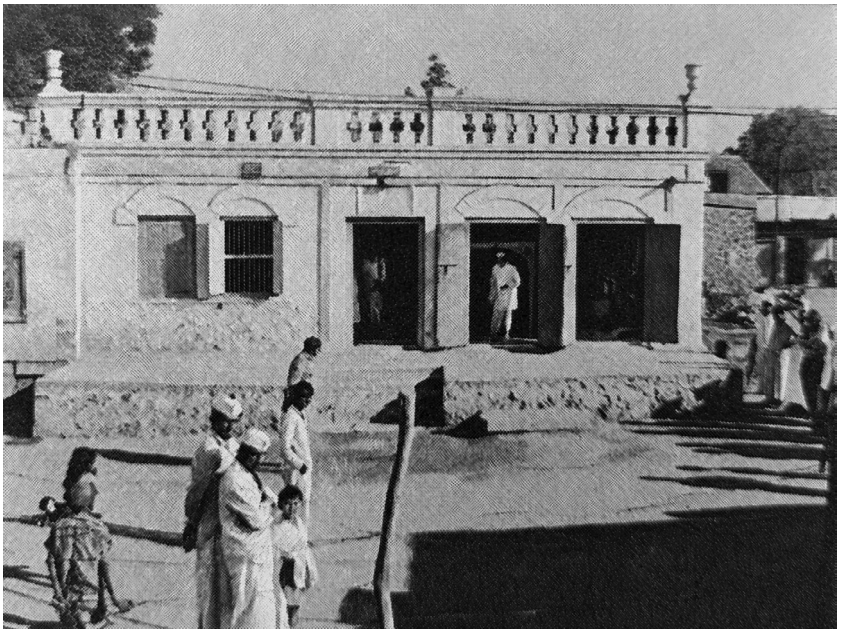

Figure 34 The old *cāvaḍī*

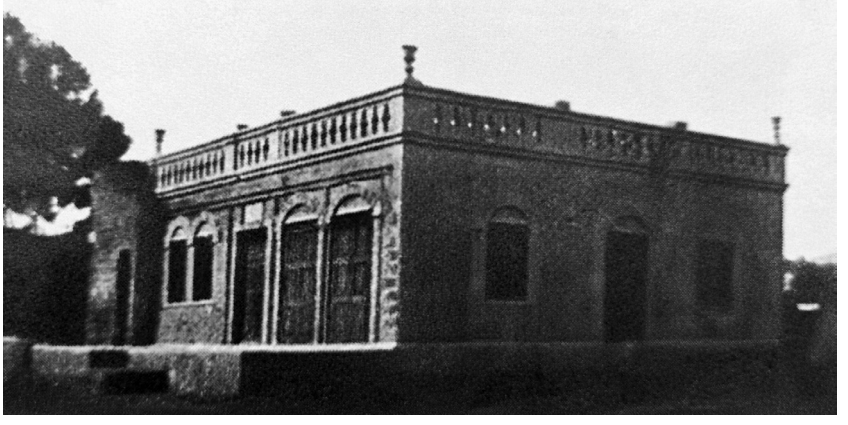

Figure 35 Another view of the old *cāvaḍī*

> Shirdi, Sunday 24 December 1911
>
> In the morning I got up early and went to Kakad Arti. On my return I prayed and walked about.
> Mr. Maruti *got permission to return*, so he went away with all his family after saying goodbye to nearly everyone. He is a very very good man. Wamanrao Patel also went.
> Then came a large number of visitors. Among them was a lady by name Anusuyabai. She appeared to be spiritually advanced and *Sayin Maharaj treated her with great consideration and gave her four fruits*.
> ***Later on he told the story of a man having five sons. Four of them demanded and obtained partition. Two of these four decided to reunite with the father. The latter ordered the mother to poison one of these two and she obeyed. The other fell from a tall tree, got injured, and was on the point of death, but was allowed by the father to survive about twelve years until a son and a daughter were born to him and then he died. Sayin Baba said nothing about the fifth son and to me the story looks incomplete.***
> After the midday meal I lay down for a while and then sat reading the Ramayan. The mail arrived and I had a good read out of the dailies.
> In the evening we went as usual *to salute the Sayin Saheb opposite the Chavadi* and at night had Bhishma's Bhajan and Dixit's Ramayan.
> Dr. Hate is still here and is a very very nice man. Mr. Mahajani is also here.

The *faqīr*'s gift of four fruits to the lady, whom he treated "with great consideration", may be understood as a special blessing. Symbolically, the number four traditionally signifies completeness. One might therefore speculate that, through this gesture, Sai Baba alluded either to the four goals of human life (*puruṣārtha*s) – *kāma*, *artha*, *dharma*, and *mokṣa* – or to the fourfold qualifications of a spiritual aspirant (*sādhanacatuṣṭaya*): the desire for liberation (*mumukṣutva*), discrimination between the eternal and the transient (*nityānityavastuviveka*), detachment from the fruits of action (*ihāmutraphalabhogavirāga*), and the cultivation of the six virtues (*ṣaṭsampatti*), namely equanimity (*sama*), self-control (*dama*), withdrawal (*uparati*), endurance (*titikṣa*), concentration (*samādhāna*), and faith (*śraddhā*).[134] Alternatively, the gift may also be read more concretely as an allusion to future pregnancies, since Sai Baba's offering of fruit to women is often associated with the blessing of offspring. In this regard, the saint is said to have compared a daughter to a sour tamarind fruit and a son to a sweet mango.[135]

The *faqīr*'s tale bears similarities to the one narrated on 19 December and may be regarded as a variation on the same theme. The father of the five sons may again be interpreted as God or Allāh. The four sons who demand their

134 Apparently, Sai Baba explicitly mentioned the importance of the *sādhanacatuṣṭaya*; see Rigopoulos, *Life and Teachings*, 278, 314-15.

135 See Narasimhaswami, *Life of Sai Baba*, 2: 9-10; Rigopoulos, *Life and Teachings*, 110-11. More often, however, it was the mango fruit which was taken as symbolic of offspring, both male and female: "Baba said, 'she will get eight children. The marvel of these [four] mangoes will bring forth four sons and four daughters'"; Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 413 (chap. 25, v. 97). Even a coconut placed on a woman's lap was symbolic of her future pregnancy; see *ibid.*, 794 (chap. 48, vv. 166-68).

share[136] and seek to leave the paternal home exemplify the human desire for independence and self-determination. At the same time, their departure reflects the risks inherent in such freedom: the possibility of losing oneself in the material world and of severing one's connection with the divine source. Human existence may thus be understood as a movement away from one's origin toward external multiplicity, followed by the eventual return to that primordial source, where reunion with the divine becomes possible.[137]

The fact that two of the four sons later change their minds and return to their father – perhaps after squandering their wealth – highlights the father's enduring compassion and readiness to receive them. The episode in which the father orders the mother, who may be understood as representing nature (*prakṛti*) or *māyā*, to poison one of these sons can be interpreted as illustrating the inexorable operation of the law of *karma*. Nature, as the instrument of divine will, carries out this command without question. The narrative offers no moral justification for the son's fate, nor does it attribute his death to any specific wrongdoing. Rather, it suggests that such outcomes belong to a larger, inscrutable order that must ultimately be accepted as an expression of divine justice.[138]

From an allegorical perspective, the four sons may be taken to represent the fourfold inner organ (*antaḥkaraṇa*): *manas*, *buddhi*, *citta*, and *ahaṃkāra*. Their division of property corresponds to their engagement with and enjoyment (*bhoga*) of the material world. The son whom the father orders to be poisoned may be identified with *ahaṃkāra*, the ego, which constitutes the principal barrier to the realization of God. Its annihilation is therefore not an act of cruelty but a necessary step toward liberation. The "poison" administered by nature can thus be understood as something destructive to the ego yet ultimately beneficial to the soul – indeed, as a form of *amṛta*, a salvific 'poison' that dissolves the illusion of individuality. This interpretation resonates with Sai Baba's own nondual teaching:

> Pull down that wall of the Teli, the wall of separateness between you and me. The way will then be wide open for us to meet each other.[139]
>
> Sometimes I am a dog and sometimes a pig; sometimes I am a cow, sometimes a cat, and sometimes an ant, a fly, an aquatic creature – in such various forms do I move about in this world. Know, that I like only him who sees me in all the living beings. So give up the sense of differentiation. This is the way to worship me.[140]

136 As in Jesus' parables, a recurring theme in Sai Baba's parables is that of fathers dividing their property among their sons at the sons' insistence.

137 In this regard, Jesus' parable of the prodigal son (*Luke* 15:11-32) immediately comes to mind.

138 On the inexorability of destiny in the saint's own words, see Narasimhaswami, *Charters and Sayings*, 118, 245-6.

139 Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 573 (chap. 35, v. 47). See also Chitluri, *Baba's Vaani*, 123.

140 Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 143 (chap. 9, vv. 129-30). See also *ibid*., 243 (chap. 15, vv. 72-3), 312 (chap. 19, vv. 146-47), 649 (chap. 39, v. 71), 659 (chap. 40, vv. 2-3), 715 (chap. 43, vv. 120-23), 716 (chap. 43, v. 126), 733 (chap. 44, v. 142), 806 (chap. 49, v. 127), 815 (chap. 50, vv. 27-8), 821 (chap. 50, vv. 89, 94), 824 (chap. 50, v. 124), 827 (chap. 50, v. 155); Satpathy, *An Inspiring Life*, 178-9, 188-9. On Sai Baba's identification with animals, see Rigopoulos, "Animals in the *Shri Sai Satcharita*": 257-87.

A comparable image appears, in a different religious context, in the words of Paul the Apostle in *Ephesians* 2:14-15: "For he [= Jesus] is himself our peace. Gentiles and Jews, he has made the two one, and in his own body of flesh and blood has broken down the enmity which stood like a dividing wall between them; for he annulled the law with its rules and regulations, so as to create out of the two a single new humanity in himself, thereby making peace".[141]

The detail that another son, having returned to his father, falls from a tall tree[142] and is severely injured may likewise be interpreted symbolically. The ascent of the tree may represent engagement in spiritual or yogic practice, while the fall suggests an inability to attain its highest goal, namely *samādhi*. In this case, however, the father shows compassion, perhaps in recognition of the son's sincere effort, and allows him to survive. The twelve additional years granted to him signify a period of completion, during which he fathers a son and a daughter. This development may be read as enabling him to fulfill his duties as a householder and discharge his debt to his ancestors (*pitṛ-ṛṇa*). Allegorically, this son may be identified with *buddhi*, the intellect, whose discriminative capacity (*viveka*) is essential for attaining liberation. The two children born to him may then be understood as its highest fruits: knowledge (*jñāna*) and devotion (*bhakti*), or alternatively the complementary virtues of faith (*śraddhā*/*niṣṭhā*) and patience (*saburī*), which Sai Baba frequently emphasized as indispensable for spiritual progress.[143] Having fulfilled its function, the intellect ultimately recedes.

Khaparde remarks that the story appears incomplete, since nothing is said about the fifth son – the one who neither demanded a share nor left his father's house. This observation is understandable, yet it is equally noteworthy that no mention is made of the two sons who never returned. From an allegorical standpoint, the fifth son may be identified with the *ātman*, the inner self or pure witness (*sākṣin*), which remains ever united with the divine and does not partake in the movements of departure and return. The two sons who fail to return may be associated with *manas* and *citta*. As the material basis of egoic consciousness, *manas* is ultimately recognized as illusory and destined to dissolve, just like the sense of 'I'. Similarly, *citta*, understood as the complex of mental modifications, is subject to cessation, as expressed in Patañjali's well-known definition: *yogaś cittavṛttinirodhaḥ* ('Yoga is the cessation of the fluctuations of the mind'; *Yogasūtra*s 1.2).[144] This may explain why the narrative remains silent about their fate.

A comparable symbolic interpretation is offered by Bharadwaja, although he does not address all aspects of the tale. He understands the five sons as representing the ego (*ahaṃkāra*), intellect (*buddhi*), mind (*manas*), *citta*, and the physical body. In his reading, the ego is destroyed, while the intellect – having subdued the illusory mind – gives rise to devotion and wisdom. The body, in turn, is ultimately recognized as unreal from the

141 *The New English Bible: New Testament*, 330. For a commentary on this passage, see Ravasi, *Biografia di Paolo*, 111-15.

142 On one occasion, Sai Baba spoke to Balkrishna Govind Upasani Shastri of a tree and of two persons on it – one ascending and the other descending; see Narasimhaswami, *Devotees' Experiences*, 228-30. See also Bharadwaja, *Sai Baba the Master*, 33. For a tentative interpretation, see Rigopoulos, *Life and Teachings*, 155.

143 See Sachdeva, *Living with Faith and Patience*.

144 On *citta*, see Rigopoulos, "*Citta* nello Yoga classico", 47-71.

absolute standpoint. While differing in detail, this interpretation broadly aligns with the allegorical framework outlined above. He writes as follows:

> God is the father, *prakriti* or *maya* is the mother. The five sons are the ego, *buddhi*, *manas*, *chitta* and body. The son ego or *ahamkara* had perished. The [one] discriminating the illusionary mind [= *manas*] that veils the Spirit [i.e., the *buddhi*] got subdued, and hence it could beget the two children, devotion and wisdom. So nothing remains to be said of the body which is then realized to be unreal from the absolute point of view.[145]

> Shirdi, Monday 25 December 1911
>
> In the morning after prayer *I saw Sayin Maharaj go out* and sat talking with Mr. Mahajani and others. Many guests went and many more came, and things are wearing a rather busy appearance. Mr. Govardhandas gave a dinner and invited nearly every one here who has come to see Sayin Maharaj.
> *My son Balvant had a dream last night in which he thought he saw Sayin Maharaj and Mr. Bapusaheb Jog in our* Elichpur[146] *house. He offered food to Sayin Baba. He told me about the dream and I thought it was a mere fancy, but today he called Balvant and said "I went to your house yesterday and you fed me but gave no Dakshina. You should give twenty-five Rupees now". So Balvant returned to the lodgings and went with Madhavrao Deshpande and paid the Dakshina.*
> *At midday Arti, Sayin Maharaj gave me Prasad of Peda,*[147] *fruits, and made a distinct sign to me to make a bow. I at once prostrated myself. He had some confidential talk with Madhavrao Deshpande.* The latter has promised to tell me all about it.
> Today the breakfast was very late, and was not over till 4 PM. I had it with Govardhandas, or rather at the Mandap near our lodging, spread at his expense. After it I felt very lazy and sat talking.
> *We all saw Sayin Maharaj in the evening both before he came out as usual for his stroll and then again when he was taken in Bhajan procession to Chavadi.*
> Kondaji Fakir lost his daughter tonight. She was interred near our lodging.
> Bhishma had his Bhajan and Dixit read Ramayan.

Khaparde documents the large influx of visitors, to the point that "things are wearing a rather busy appearance", thereby confirming the growing fame of the saint of Shirdi. Mr. Govardhandas, a wealthy *bhakta*, wishing to perform an act that would please the *faqīr*, resolved to offer a grand meal to "everyone here who has come to see Sayin Maharaj". To this end, he had a *maṇḍap* erected at his own expense near Dixit's *vāḍā*, that is, a temporary pillared structure used for such occasions. The preparation of the meal and the associated

145 Bharadwaja, *Sai Baba the Master*, 93.

146 A village in the Amravati District of Maharashtra.

147 Thick, semi-soft round balls. *Peda*s are sweets made with a combination of dried milk solids, sugar and milk, and any preferred flavoring spices.

arrangements must have required considerable organization; as Khaparde notes, "today the breakfast was very late, and was not over till 4 PM".

Balvant's dream of receiving Sai Baba in his house in Elichpur and offering him food – dismissed by his father as "a mere fancy" – found striking confirmation when the saint summoned him and said: "I went to your house yesterday and you fed me, but gave no *dakṣiṇā*. You should give twenty-five rupees now". In this way, the *faqīr* implicitly acknowledged the reality of the dream, that is, he had indeed visited Balvant's house, albeit on a different plane. The saint's words support the widespread belief that he may appear in dreams and that nothing can be concealed from him, his omniscience extending even to events occurring within the dream state. Sai Baba thus appears to make no strict distinction between the dreaming and waking states, regarding them as equally real.[148] In particular, dreams in which the *guru* appears are understood as genuine *darśan*s, tokens of his grace.[149] Moreover, devotees commonly believe that such dreams do not occur by chance but are the result of the *guru*'s divine will (*saṅkalpa*).

The *faqīr* had already asked Khaparde's son Balvant for *dakṣiṇā* a week earlier, on 17 December. This request may be interpreted in terms of a 'karmic debt' owed by Balvant – indeed by Khaparde and his family – to the saint, who, without their knowledge, was said to undergo various hardships in order to protect them from danger. The sum of twenty-five rupees in 1911 was considerable;[150] nevertheless, Balvant showed no hesitation. He immediately returned to his lodgings, retrieved the money, and hastened back to the *masjid* where, accompanied by Madhavrao Deshpande, he offered the *dakṣiṇā* to Sai Baba. His prompt obedience attests to his steadfast devotion. Symbolically, the number twenty-five may be understood as representing totality, much as the twenty-five principles (*tattva*s) of Sāṃkhya philosophy encompass the entirety of existence: *puruṣa* (pure spirit), *prakṛti* (matter), *buddhi* (intellect), *ahaṃkāra* (the sense of 'I'), *manas* (mind), and the four pentads consisting of the five cognitive senses (*buddhīndriya*s), the five organs of action (*karmendriya*s), the five subtle elements (*tanmātra*s), and the five gross elements (*mahābhūta*s). In this light, the devotee is called to surrender everything to the divine.

Khaparde further notes that, during the midday *ārtī*, Sai Baba graciously bestowed upon him *peda*s and fruits as *prasād*, and shortly thereafter "made a distinct sign to make a bow", whereupon he "at once prostrated" himself. This detail is noteworthy, as the *faqīr* frequently communicated through gestures and glances rather than speech. His authoritative gesture directing Khaparde to perform *namaskār* may be understood as a reminder of the need for total consecration: the surrender of mind and heart to the *guru*, accompanied by the relinquishing of all other concerns. Within this

148 From a Hindu viewpoint, this is reminiscent of an Advaita Vedānta metaphysical framework. On these issues, see Sharma, *Experiential Dimension of Advaita Vedanta*.

149 Hagiographic literature is replete with accounts of miracles performed by Sai Baba, both before and after his death, often through his appearance in devotees' dreams. See Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 319-20 (chap. 19, vv. 225-8), 451-87 (chaps. 28-9), 496-7 (chap. 30, vv. 92-113), 543 (chap. 33, vv. 126-7), 668-9 (chap. 40, vv. 113-18), 687-8 (chap. 41, vv. 160-70), 719 (chap. 43, vv. 162-4), 745 (chap. 45, vv. 77-90), 771 (chap. 47, vv. 87-117, 175-82), 789 (chap. 48, vv. 101-7). See also Chitluri, *Baba's Vaani*, 148, 151-2, 155-6.

150 At the time, an average monthly salary was around thirty to forty rupees.

devotional framework, Sai Baba is believed to assume full responsibility for those who surrender themselves entirely to him.

Finally, Khaparde remarks that the *faqīr* "had some confidential talk with Madhavrao Deshpande", who was, as noted, among the saint's closest devotees. That Madhavrao later promised to "tell him all about it" may suggest that Sai Baba communicated something pertaining to Khaparde and his family.

> Shirdi, Tuesday 26 December 1911
>
> I got up early and attended Kakad Arti. *Sayin Maharaj was in a rather unusual mood, took his stick and with it tapped the ground round about. By the time he descended the steps of Chavadi he walked twice backward and forward and used violent language.*
> On my return I prayed, bathed and sat in the verandah in front of my room. *I saw Sayin Maharaj go out.*
> The Injadars [= Inamdars][151] of Kalyan and Poona are here. I am afraid Mungi hunts with them. He is at any rate very familiar. Mungi, whom I met here last year, came last night and tried to put up with me. I would not let him. He then put his coat in my room, but with the help of Ram Maruti I told him to take it away and he did so.
> Mr. Gokhale pleader of Poona came. He had seen my wife at Shegaon before, when Ganapati Baba[152] was working in the physical world. There was with him a seller of Indian toys and another. They saw me after the midday Arti and after I had taken my meal.
> I lay down for a while in the third quarter of the day and then sat talking with Mahajani, Dr. Hate and others. *We saw Sayin Maharaj in the afternoon at the Chavadi and later on about dusk when he came out for his stroll. He was very gracious. Today he spoke with my son Balvant and got him to sit even after he told everybody else to clear out. He told him not to admit guest in the evening and to take care of him and that in return he (Sayin Baba) would take care of him.*
> Madhavrao Deshpande is ill. He has caught cold and is lying down a good deal, if not actually confined to bed.
> In the evening there was Bhishma's Bhajan as usual and Dixit's Ramayan afterwards. Mr. Bhate was there to hear the Purana.[153] We began the Sundar Kand[154] today.

In the morning, the saint is reported to have been "in a rather unusual mood", tapping the ground around him with his stick (*satka*) – possibly as a warning of some impending danger, the act functioning as a kind of ritual intended to avert calamity – and displaying signs of agitation, repeatedly pacing back and forth. The ascetic's staff symbolizes spiritual authority and is believed to possess

151 A feudal title granted to someone who received land as a gift (*inām*), as a reward for services rendered to a local ruler.

152 Gajanan Maharaj.

153 What is meant here by 'Purana' is the *Rāmāyaṇa* epic.

154 The fifth of the seven books of the *Rāmāyaṇa,* in which the principal protagonist is not Rāma but Hanumān.

protective and even apotropaic powers.[155] The *faqīr*'s use of "violent language" was not uncommon: his harsh words were directed either against specific individuals or – more often, it seems – against impending dangers (such as fire or snakebite), malignant forces (spirits, diseases such as fever or plague), or the internal enemies of man (the *ṣaḍripu*s), with the aim of neutralizing them and preventing harm to his devotees. Given that Khaparde suspected that the "very familiar" Mr. Mungi – whom he had already met in Shirdi the previous year – and the two Ināmdārs who arrived that day were British government agents sent to monitor his activities, one may hypothesize that Sai Baba's agitation was prompted by their unwelcome presence. Under the pretense of friendship, Mr. Mungi even attempted to lodge with Khaparde at Dixit's *vāḍā* by "putting his coat in his room", but Khaparde succeeded in sending him away.

In the afternoon, Khaparde was likely relieved to observe that Sai Baba was once again "very gracious". The saint showed particular favor toward his son, asking him to remain seated after dismissing the others from the mosque. His instruction to Balvant "not to admit guest in the evening" was given in confidence and may be interpreted as indicating that the *faqīr* did not wish him to receive visitors in his own lodging or that of his father – presumably because Sai Baba was aware of the presence of spies in the village. The implication is that Balvant and his father were to refrain from engaging with outsiders, as such interactions might prove risky.

The saint further emphasizes that if Balvant were to "take care of him", he, in turn, would take care of Balvant – that is, if the disciple respected the master's wish for privacy, the master would reciprocate. The bond between *guru* and disciple, like that between father and son, is intimate and grounded in reciprocity, forming a communion of love. The devotee is taught to take a step toward the *guru*-God, who in turn responds by taking a hundred steps toward the devotee. Indeed, even the disciple's initial movement toward the master is understood as the effect of the master's grace (*kṛpā*). Sai Baba's words to Balvant – and, indirectly, to his father – may thus be read as an assurance that there is nothing to fear, provided one follows the *guru*'s instructions and entrusts everything to him. It is significant that the saint chose to address Balvant in private, likely in order to avoid being overheard by the suspected agents.

Shirdi, Wednesday 27 December 1911

I did not sleep well last night but got up early in the morning, prayed, bathed and dressed earlier than usual. The detectives here appeared to be more active than usual today. One stationed himself near Sayin Maharaj. Another followed me. To test him, I went to Tipnis' house to see his wife.[156] The detective of Kalyan followed me there and returned with me when I returned.
The chief constable of Kopargaon came with a head constable and took his seat in my room. My son Balvant happened to be there but there was no conversation between them. Later on they withdrew without doing anything, but they had a long consultation in front of Dixit's Wada. I wonder what the

155 See Rigopoulos, *Life and Teachings*, 50-1, 158. On occasion, Sai Baba would bless devotees by giving them one of his *satka*s; see Chitluri, *Baba's Vaani*, 84.

156 Evidently, she was feeling better and was no longer staying in Dixit's *vāḍā*.

> whole fuss was about. Mungi was much with them.
> After the midday Arti, I had my breakfast about 3 PM and then lay down and had a good sleep. *In the afternoon many people attempted to go and see Sayin Maharaj but he was not inclined to speak and dimissed them soon*. So I did not go and sat reading.
> *We all saw him at dusk when he came out for his stroll and again at Shej Arti*.
> Bhishma's Bhajan was very much prolonged today by many people singing at it. A young Mohamedan surprised me by his song. Then there was Ramayan by Dixit.

Khaparde writes that "the detectives appeared more active than usual". From early morning, they followed him wherever he went and monitored Sai Baba as well. In order to investigate Khaparde, the chief constable of Kopargaon arrived that day, together with another head constable, and "took his seat in his room". Nonetheless, Khaparde's son Balvant, following Sai Baba's instructions, avoided speaking to him. The fact that these individuals, along with Mungi, were highly animated and engaged in a "long consultation in front of Dixit's *vāḍā*" must have been a cause for concern for Khaparde, and he was no doubt relieved when later "they withdrew without doing anything", that is, without arresting him or accusing him of any crime.

The fact that "in the afternoon many people attempted to go and see Sayin Maharaj, but he was not inclined to speak and dismissed them soon" was probably related to the presence of these detectives. It is clear that they also kept Sai Baba under surveillance, observing his movements and possibly suspecting a political connection with Khaparde. In particular, they were interested in the questions posed to him by devotees – especially those of a political nature – and in the saint's responses. Sai Baba, however, had no political interests and never engaged in political discussion, nor did he make political predictions about the future.

The saint's occasional unwillingness to receive visitors or speak to them – despite the growing crowds noted by Khaparde – even during the scheduled times of public gatherings at the mosque (the *darbār*s), was an integral aspect of his ascetic disposition. Although he was accessible to all and, as he himself remarked, his *darbār* was always open, there were certain hours – such as the early afternoon and nighttime – and particular occasions when he preferred to be left alone. As Khaparde wrote two weeks earlier, on 10 December 1911: "I made two attempts to see Sayin Maharaj in the afternoon, but he was not in the mood to see anybody".[157] He clearly valued silence and solitude, and by dismissing the crowds sought to preserve both his privacy and a peaceful atmosphere. As the *Shri Sai Satcharita* (chap. 4, verse 52) states: "Though outwardly he held a splendid *durbar* regularly and related a thousand and one stories, yet inwardly he was committed to silence".[158] Although he was generally kind – Khaparde's entries suggest that he was often in a good mood – he could also be unpredictable, and his temperament could change abruptly. The *Shri Sai Satcharita* (chap. 6, v. 146) observes: "Sometimes he would be so calm and composed and would converse lovingly, sometimes, in a

157 *Shirdi Diary of the Hon'ble Mr. Ganesh Shrikrishna Khaparde, Advocate, Umraoti*; http://saiamrithadhara.com/docs/G.%20S.%20Khaparde%20Diary.pdf.pdf. See also *Shirdi Diary of the Hon'ble Mr. G.S. Khaparde*, 18. A source reports that once, around 3 PM, Sai Baba "was sitting still as if in meditation", and did not want to be disturbed; Chitluri, *Baba's Rinanubandh*, 16.

158 Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 59.

flash, and without apparent reason, his mind would be in great agitation".[159] As Vinny Chitluri remarks: "[A]t times he chose to be very stubborn; with 'mood swings' and often exhibited sham rage. These dramatic moods were a means to an end or to emphasize, and drive home a point".[160]

Although some people in Shirdi regarded Sai Baba as mad (*pāgal*), especially in his early years, his unusual behavior and abrupt mood changes should not be attributed to any lack of rationality. Rather, they may be understood in light of his intuitive knowledge (*antarajñāna*) of people and future events. His seemingly unpredictable actions and incomprehensible reactions may reflect a heightened awareness of circumstances unfolding in his surroundings, as well as of events affecting individuals with whom he was connected, whether near or far. Sai Baba himself explicitly told his devotee Ganpatrao G. Narke that he was not mad. As recorded:

> At Baba's Arati, G.G. Narke found him in a rage without any apparent cause and wondered if Baba was mad. This was a passing thought. Later in the evening, when G.G. Narke massaged Baba's feet, Baba [said] to G.G. Narke: "I am not mad".[161]

> Shirdi, Thursday 28 December 1911
>
> In the morning, after I prayed, Dr. Hate and Mr. R.D. Moregaonkar *got permission to return*. So they went away and immediately after came Nanasaheb Chandorkar, C.V. Vaidya and Mr. Natekar "Hamsa". I sat long speaking with the last and then went and saw the former two who are staying in a tent close by. Hamsa has travelled long in the Himalayas, is an initiate and an accepted disciple. His conversation is therefore very edifying. C.V. Vaidya has some trouble in one of his eyes. It is very red. Mr. Chandorkar is very jolly as usual.
> We attended the midday Arti. Trimbakrao known as Maruti is very angry. He did not attend the worship today and was very sulky. Madhavrao Deshpande is better today. He was on his legs nearly the whole day. Dixit is very assiduous in attending to all guests who are very numerous. Mr. Chandorkar went to Kalyan today and said he would return on Sunday next.
> I sat talking with Hamsa in the afternoon, nearly up to the time of going to see Sayin Maharaj as he goes out for his stroll. *He did not permit anybody to sit there today but dismissed every one with "Udi".* Hamsa went to Radhakrishna [Bai] and spent the evening there. She sings well and does Bhajan very excellent.
> We had Bhishma's Bhajan in which many joined and then there was Dixit's Ramayan.
> The Sub-Inspector of Kalyan went away today and in going saluted me very humbly which is rather strange. Mungi is still here wandering about among people. Dada Gole has come here from Morsi. One of my clients, Ramrao, is also here. He wishes me to write an appeal. There is no time for it.

159 Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 102.

160 Chitluri, *Baba's Vaani*, 18.

161 Narasimhaswami, *Charters and Sayings*, 183. See also Satpathy, *An Inspiring Life*, 84. On the madness of saints in the Marāṭhī cultural milieu, the case of Guṇḍam Rāüḷ is exemplary; see Feldhaus, *Deeds of God in Ṛddhipur*. See also Feuerstein, *Holy Madness*.

Khaparde's remark that Dixit was "very assiduous in attending to all guests who are very numerous", together with his note that Chandorkar and C.V. Vaidya were "staying in a tent" – evidently because all available lodgings were full – constitutes further evidence of Sai Baba's growing fame and the crowds that daily poured into the village.

Once again, the saint wished to be left alone and did not allow anyone to enter the mosque for the usual meetings. He dismissed the assembled devotees by distributing *udī*, the sacred ash of the *dhunī*, as a token of his blessings.

Khaparde also records his meeting with Mr. Natekar, alias "Hamsa", who presented himself as an ascetic and an initiate and spent considerable time conversing with him; the diarist found the exchange "very edifying". Khaparde had known him even before coming to Shirdi, as "Hamsa" had previously been a guest at his house in Amravati.[162] In reality, however, this proved to be a deception, for Khaparde later discovered that Natekar was a detective of the Criminal Investigation Department sent by the British government to monitor his movements and gather information about his activities. The authorities were also interested in understanding the nature of his relationship with the Shirdi *faqīr*, as his prolonged stay had aroused their suspicion.

There was a constant coming and going of detectives in Shirdi. Khaparde notes that "Mungi is still here wandering about among people", while "the Sub-Inspector of Kalyan went away today and, in leaving, saluted me very humbly, which is rather strange", that is, suspicious. These investigators mingled with the crowds, and Khaparde was likely unaware of many of them. The saint's unfavorable mood and reluctance to receive visitors were thus likely due – at least in part – to his awareness of the presence of spies in the village and of the potential danger to Khaparde and his family.

> Shirdi, Friday 29 December 1911
>
> I was a little late in getting up and then sat talking with Mr. Natekar whom we call "Hamsa" and also "Swami". I could not finish my prayer etc. in time to go and see Sayin Maharaj as he went out.
> *I saw him when he returned to Masjid.* "Hamsa" was with me. *Sayin Maharaj was in very good mood and* ***began a story which was very very instructive but unfortunately Trimbakrao whom we call Maruti interrupted most foolishly and Sayin Maharaj changed the subject.***[163]
> ***He said that there was a young man very hungry and wanting in almost every respect. The young man after wandering about went to Sayin Saheb's father's house and was received very kindly and given everything he required. The boy spent some time there, felt fat, collected a few things, stole***

162 While Khaparde was in England, "Hamsa" enjoyed the hospitality of his family for an entire month. At the end of March 1913, it was discovered that nine of Khaparde's diaries had been stolen. The theft was later attributed to "Hamsa"; see Kunte, *Source Material*, 394. These diaries were subsequently returned by the government, as no incriminating material was found in them. Vishwas Bal Kher describes "Hamsa" as follows: "Hamsa was slight and fair and had sharp features, a sweet voice, and a gift of the gab as well"; Kher, "More about 'Shirdi Diary'", 118.

163 This Trimbakrao (= Tryambak Rao), alias Maruti, had already interrupted Sai Baba on 19 December. The day before, Khaparde had written that Trimbakrao was "very angry", "did not attend the worship", i.e., the *ārtī*, and was "very sulky". The reason for his anger, however, is not given.

> ***ornaments, and making the whole into a bundle wished to return to where he had come from. He was really born in and belonged to Sayin Saheb's father's house but did not know it. The boy put the bundle into the corner of a street but was seen before he could actually start. So he had to delay. In the meantime, thieves took away the ornaments from his bundle. He missed them when he was on the point of starting, so he kept at the house and collected more ornaments and actually started, but people on the way arrested him on the suspicion of his having come by the things by theft. At this point the story got diverted and ended abruptly.***
> On my return from the midday Arti, I requested "Hamsa" to take his food with me and he kindly accepted my invitation. He is a very nice simple man and after meals he told us about his travels in the Himalayas, how he crested Manasa Sarowar, how he heard an Upanisad being sung there, how he followed footprints, how he reached a cave, saw a Mahatma, how the latter spoke of the conviction of Mr. Tilak that day at Bombay, how the Mahatma introduced him to his brother (elder fellow student), how he finally met his Guru and became "Kritarth".[164]
> Later on we went to Sayin Baba and *saw him at the Masjid. He sent me a word this afternoon that I have to stay here another two months. He confirmed the message in the afternoon and then said that his 'Udi' had great spiritual properties.* ***He told my wife that the Governor came with a lance, that Sayin Maharaj had a tussle with him and drove him out, and that he finally conciliated the Governor. The language is highly figurative and therefore difficult to interpret.***
> In the evening we attended the Shej Arti and then had the Bhajan of Bhishma and Ramayan of Dixit.
> PS: "Hamsa" had told all this to me also when he was our guest. It turned out to be a lie afterwards. He had never been to Manas in Himalayas. Acquired a reputation of being a bad character. Gajanan Purohit was his accomplice. Both suspected to be police spies.[165]

At the morning gathering in the *masjid,* Khaparde notes that Sai Baba was in a "very good mood" and that the story he narrated was "very very instructive", although he does not explain why he found it so enlightening. The fact that the saint abruptly "changed the subject" after being "foolishly interrupted" by Trimbakrao (alias Maruti) suggests that he demanded complete attention from his listeners. Any disturbance caused him to stop speaking immediately, much to the dissatisfaction of those present. To emphasize the need for one-pointed concentration, the saint narrated the following story:

> There was once a fickle-minded man, whose house was full of wealth, food grains, etc. Physically and mentally, he had no illness or affliction. But he liked to court trouble. Needlessly, he wandered about, carrying a heavy burden on his head. His mind knew no peace. One moment he would put down the load, only to pick it up the next moment. He could not steady his

164 Lit. 'one who has attained his purpose' (*kṛtārtha*).

165 This *post scriptum* was written much later, when Khaparde came to realize that "Hamsa" was a detective of the Criminal Investigation Department. On "Hamsa", see Khaparde, *Śrī Dādāsāheb Khāparḍe*, 421-4. In an entry dated 14 June 1913, Khaparde wrote: "'Hamsa' appears to have taken in many on the pretext of being a *sadhu*"; Kher, "More about 'Shirdi Diary'", 119.

> mind. Seeing his plight, my heart was moved by compassion and I said to him, "Steady your mind and fix it on one thing – whatever that may be! You wander needlessly. Steadily fix your mind in one place".[166]

Returning to the tale, Sai Baba focuses on primary human needs, describing the young man as "hungry and wanting in almost every respect". After wandering about helplessly, he finally finds shelter in Sai Baba's father's house, the *faqīr*'s father being none other than Allāh and his house his wondrous kingdom. Sai Baba's self-presentation as one of God's children who abides in his father's home serves to highlight his communion with the Lord. The father is deeply compassionate toward the young man, receives him kindly, and provides for all his needs to the point that, after some time, he "felt fat".

Despite this generosity, the young man, driven by greed, shows no gratitude toward his benefactor. Instead, he steals ornaments and other valuables, bundling them together as he prepares to leave the house and return to his former place. This bundle may be read as symbolizing his covetousness. Significantly, the narrative emphasizes that "he was really born and belonged to Sayin Saheb's father's house but did not know it", underscoring the theme of spiritual ignorance. In other words, God is presented as the true abode of all beings, who are, in essence, his children. Yet, lacking this awareness, the young man attempts to abandon his true home. Even after being discovered, he does not abandon his plan but merely postpones his departure.

At this point, other thieves appear and steal the ornaments he himself had taken. This episode suggests that when individuals attempt to separate themselves from God, they become entangled in the world – a realm characterized by conflict, competition, and the relentless pursuit of material goods. The 'thieves' function as a recurring metaphor in Sai Baba's teachings, representing both external dangers and internal vices. Indeed, the human being may be understood as a 'house' in which such 'thieves' – lust, anger, greed, and other passions – enter and reside.[167]

The moral implication is clear: true freedom requires the relinquishment of greed and attachment. This teaching resonates with broader scriptural traditions. In the *Bhagavadgītā* (2.45), Kṛṣṇa instructs Arjuna to transcend concern with "acquisition and preservation" (*yogakṣema*). Similarly, in *Matthew* 6:19-21, Jesus warns: "Do not store up for yourselves treasure on earth, where it grows rusty and moth-eaten, and thieves break in to steal it. Store up treasure

166 Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 578-9 (chap. 35, vv. 115-18).

167 As Jesus states in *Mark* 7:20-3: "It is what comes out of a man that defiles him. For from inside, out of a man's heart, come evil thoughts, acts of fornication, of theft, murder, adultery, ruthless greed, and malice; fraud, indecency, envy, slander, arrogance, and folly; these evil things all come from inside, and they defile the man"; *The New English Bible: New Testament*, 70. Once, Sai Baba narrated the following tale: "I had many sacks laden with gold on the donkey's back. On the way, thieves stole the gold. For this very reason it is very difficult to live in the neighbourhood of thieves. To teach you this, my brother [= Madhavnath Maharaj] has sent you to me. Today we will have Nath's *prasad*". Here follows Vinny Chitluri's explanation: "The 'I' is *parabrahman*. The 'sacks of gold' represent the knowledge embedded within one's self. The 'donkey' represents people like us who carry the weight of this materialistic world on our backs. As we lead our lives, along the way thieves steal the gold or knowledge. The 'thieves' are *maya* and the *arishadvarga*s [= the six enemies: lust, anger, greed, hatred, pride and envy or jealousy] combined together. They steal that knowledge, so it becomes difficult to strike a balance between *maya* and spiritual *sadhana*" (Chitluri, *Baba's Vaani*, 115-16). On this tale, see also Narasimhaswami, *Charters and Sayings*, 275.

in heaven, where there is no moth and no rust to spoil it, no thieves to break in and steal. For where your wealth is, there will your heart be also".[168] When one succeeds in overcoming these internal 'thieves', a paradox emerges: a greater 'thief' may be discovered within the heart – God himself. In devotional traditions, Kṛṣṇa is praised as *cittacora*, 'the stealer of hearts'.[169]

The young man, however, persists in his folly. He remains in the house only long enough to steal again before finally departing, convinced that he will find happiness in the world outside – that is, in *saṃsāra*. Instead, he is arrested on suspicion of theft and accused of stealing the very items he carries. Although the story is interrupted at this point, its message is already substantially complete. It illustrates human ingratitude, greed, and spiritual ignorance. Despite receiving life and sustenance from God, individuals often fail to recognize their good fortune. They attempt to separate themselves from their divine source, imagining that they can prosper independently. The paradox is that, although they lack nothing within the divine abode, they nevertheless choose a form of self-imposed exile.

This theme finds a parallel in the Purāṇic notion that one of the defining evils of the *kali* age is the concept of private property. In contrast, the golden age (*satyayuga*) is characterized by equality, selflessness, and the sharing of all things. To distance oneself from divine love is thus to move toward suffering, driven by ignorance and pride.

Through this allegory, Sai Baba teaches that one must cultivate gratitude toward God for all gifts – above all, the gift of life. There is no greater refuge than the divine abode, for true fulfillment can be found only in union with the divine. Separation from God is presented as the root of suffering in *saṃsāra*. Saints, therefore, play a crucial role: they draw individuals back toward the divine by attracting them through various means. In this regard, a dialogue between a devotee and the *faqīr* is particularly instructive:

> A devotee objected to people going to Baba for temporal benefit e.g., employment, money, children, cure of disease.
>
> Sai Baba: "Do not do that. My men first come to me on account of that only. They get their heart's desires fulfilled; and comfortably placed in life, they then follow me and progress further. I bring my men to me from long distances under many pleas. I seek them and bring them to me. They do not come (of their own accord). I bring them to me. However distant – even thousands of miles away – my people might be, I draw them to myself, just as we pull birds[170] to us with a string tied to their foot".[171]

It remains uncertain whether Sai Baba intended this allegory for a specific individual. Nevertheless, its message is clearly universal. He appears

168 *The New English Bible: New Testament*, 11. On the imagery of the thief in Jesus' parables, see Kloppenborg, "Parable of the Burglar", 287-306.

169 See Hawley, *Krishna, the Butter Thief*, 147-50.

170 Each bird symbolizes a human soul. For the symbolism of birds in Sufism, see "When Birds Speak, Mystics Listen: Decoding Nature's Hidden Language in Sufi Tradition", available at `https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oksvF5mgEDs`.

171 Narasimhaswami, *Charters and Sayings*, 8. See also Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 452 (chap. 28, v. 15), 836 (chap. 51, v. 28). When the saint brought Nanasaheb Chandorkar to Shirdi in 1887, he declared: "I will willy-nilly drag anyone here who is mine even if he's hiding in the seventh nether world"; Chitluri, *Baba's Divine Symphony*, 7.

to warn his listeners – including Khaparde and the police investigators present – that separation from God leads to entrapment in *saṃsāra*, a 'world of thieves', where one is eventually 'arrested' and 'imprisoned'. Salvation lies in recognizing that lasting peace can be found only in God.

More tentatively, the story may also be read as indirectly addressing Khaparde himself. Sai Baba may have wished him to recognize his privileged condition: he had been drawn to Shirdi by divine grace. Khaparde is thus called to acknowledge Sai Baba as his true guide and Shirdi as his spiritual home. If he were to attempt to distance himself – symbolically 'stealing' the saint's blessings for worldly purposes – he would risk falling prey to the very forces the allegory describes.

Khaparde described the story as "very very instructive", yet he did not elaborate on his interpretation. Whether the reading offered here corresponds, even partially, to his own understanding remains unknown. His writings rarely provide explicit interpretations of Sai Baba's teachings, leaving modern readers to reconstruct their meaning through careful analysis.

By contrast, the elaborate stories that "Hamsa" recounted to Khaparde after lunch – concerning his alleged travels to the Himālayas and to Lake Mānsarovar, his encounter with a "great soul" (*mahātma*) in a cave, and, ultimately, his meeting with his own *guru* – appear to have been entirely fabricated. They constitute an idealized narrative seemingly intended to persuade Khaparde of the depth of his spirituality. It is particularly noteworthy that "Hamsa" claimed that the Mahātma had even "spoken of the conviction of Mr. Tilak", presumably in the hope that Khaparde would be prompted to comment on the matter and thereby disclose his future plans to support his leader.

In the afternoon, Sai Baba "sent word" to Khaparde that he would have to remain in Shirdi for "another two months", news that must have come as a shock to him and his family. Later that same day, he "confirmed the message", while also emphasizing that his *udī* possessed "great spiritual properties", that is, that his grace was especially efficacious. By this statement, he appears to have intended Khaparde to understand that his 'custody' in Shirdi was by no means a punishment, but rather a special form of grace bestowed upon him – one that would lead to his spiritual upliftment and, at the same time, help resolve his worldly difficulties.

On the same occasion, the *faqīr* told Khaparde's wife "that the Governor came with a lance, that Sayin Maharaj had a tussle with him and drove him out, and that he finally conciliated the Governor". Although Khaparde remarks that Sai Baba's language was "highly figurative" and therefore "difficult to interpret", the underlying message appears relatively clear. It was later understood by Khaparde's son, Babasaheb, to mean that the *faqīr* had intervened to save Khaparde from arrest by the government authorities.[172] V.B. Kher observes that "it is not without significance that… the remarks about 'Udi' and repelling the Governor… appear in the entry of 29.12.1911 while 'Hamsa' was in Shirdi. No wonder Sai Baba must have known about the machinations of 'Hamsa' and used his powers to ward off any danger to his faithful devotee".[173]

172 In his father's biography, he interprets *udī* as Sai Baba's grace, the lance of the Governor as arrest warrants, and the *triśūl* as Sai Baba's divine power. It should be noted, however, that in Khaparde's diary there is no mention of a *triśūl*, that is, a trident.

173 Kher, "More about 'Shirdi Diary'", 119.

More recently, Chandra Bhanu Satpathy has interpreted Sai Baba's words as referring to the so-called Cleveland Report, namely the proposal advanced by the Chief Commissioner of the Central Provinces, R.H. Craddock, to deport Khaparde to the island of Saint Helena. As noted above, this proposal had already been rejected by Viceroy Lord Minto in April 1909. If this interpretation were accepted, the "conciliation" would necessarily have occurred prior to Khaparde's first encounter with Sai Baba.[174] Although this remains a possibility, it seems more likely that Sai Baba had in mind a more recent confrontation with "the Governor", given that Khaparde's struggle with the British authorities was ongoing. What concerned Khaparde, moreover, was the present and the future, rather than the past – especially since he appears never to have been aware of Craddock's proposal.

The fact that the *faqīr* did not address Khaparde directly, but instead "sent him word" and subsequently "told his wife" – just as he had spoken to his son Balvant rather than to Khaparde himself on 26 December – may be taken as indicative of the saint's caution. This indirect mode of communication suggests an awareness that detectives were monitoring his interactions with Khaparde. Taken together, these circumstances strongly support the view that Sai Baba's 'custody' of Khaparde in Shirdi was intended primarily for his protection.

Through these statements, Sai Baba appears to have sought to offer Khaparde and his family a clear and reassuring message: their *guru*, conceived as a divine figure, had already confronted and overcome the hostility of the government authorities. As Narasimhaswami observed long ago, the *faqīr*'s language, in this instance, does not seem especially difficult to interpret.[175]

> Shirdi, Saturday 30 December 1911
>
> In the morning after prayer I wrote two letters – one to my son Baba[176] and the other to Bhau Durrani telling them that I am not likely to return for another two months.
> Mr. Natekar went to Radhakrishna lady. She, it would appear, was away. He sat there and felt so calm and nice that he spent the whole day there.
> I read Ramayan in the morning and heard Bhagavat[177] in the afternoon and went to Sayin Maharaj a little before dusk. *He treated me very kindly, called me by name and* ***told a small tale calculated to impress the virtue of patience. He said he went to Aurangabad on one of his wanderings and saw a Fakir sitting in a Masjid near which there was a very tall tamarind tree. The Fakir would not let him enter the Masjid first but ultimately consented to his putting up in it. The Fakir depended entirely on a piece of cake that an old woman used to supply him at midday. Sayin Maharaj***

174 See Satpathy, *New Findings*, 37-52.

175 See Narasimhaswami, *Life of Sai Baba*, 2: 318.

176 Balkrishna Ganesh, Khaparde's eldest son, also known as Babasaheb. In 1911, he was twenty-nine years old.

177 The *Eknāthī Bhāgavat* of Eknāth. Khaparde listened to its recitation in Dixit's *vāḍā*. Dabholkar states: "[T]he most merciful Sai Samarth would make his devotees read regularly, in Shirdi, this divine work [= the *Eknāthī Bhāgavat*], along with *Jnaneshvari*…"; Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 292 (chap. 18, v. 94).

> ***volunteered to beg for him and kept him supplied amply with food for twelve years and then thought of leaving the place. The old Fakir shed tears at parting and had to be consoled with soft words. Sayin Maharaj visited him four years later and found him there doing well. The Fakir then came here a few years ago and lodged at the Chavadi. Motha Baba Fakir looked after him. From what was said I gathered that Sayin Baba stayed twelve years to instruct the Aurangabad Fakir and set him up fully in the spiritual world.***
> At night there was Bhishma's Bhajan and Dixit's Ramayan. Natekar who came there also read a chapter.

Khaparde obediently accepted Sai Baba's will and, first thing in the morning, wrote letters to his elder son Babasaheb and to Mr. Durrani – possibly one of his secretaries – to inform them that he would be unable to return to Amravati or resume his business affairs for another two months. Although one may reasonably infer his disappointment, given his demanding schedule and numerous political and professional obligations, he did not for a moment question the saint's decision. He appears to have maintained absolute faith that whatever Sai Baba ordained reflected the will of God and, even if not immediately comprehensible, was ultimately for his own good.

When, later that day, he went to see Sai Baba at the *masjid*, the saint seems to have rewarded his obedience by receiving him with marked affection, like a beloved son. He treated him "very kindly", "called him by name", thereby affirming the intimacy between them, and "told a small tale calculated to impress the virtue of patience", evidently in order to strengthen his disciple's *saburī*.

The saint's narrative is framed as autobiographical – as an account of an episode in his life rather than as a parable. It recounts Sai Baba's apprenticeship and service under an unnamed *faqīr* in the town of Aurangabad, where he is said to have resided for a considerable period before eventually settling in Shirdi. The reported twelve-year duration of his stay there is best understood symbolically, signifying completeness rather than a precise chronological measure.

Evidence of Sai Baba's continued connections with Aurangabad emerges from events shortly before his death in 1918. At that time, he instructed Qasim, the son of Bade Baba (d. 1925) – a *faqīr* for whom he showed particular favor[178] – to visit the Sufi saint Shamsuddin Miyan (Shams al-Dīn Chishtī, d. 1347/1928) in Aurangabad and inform him of his impending death. Sai Baba entrusted Qasim with a sum of two hundred and fifty rupees, directing him to deliver it to Shamsuddin Miyan so that arrangements could be made for a *mawlūd* (devotional recitations in honor of the Prophet Muḥammad), *qawwālī* (Sufi devotional music), and *nyās* (the feeding of the poor). He also instructed Qasim to convey a similar message to another Aurangabad Sufi, Banne Miyan (d. 1921), stating that Allāh was about to take his life.

178 Also known as Yasin Miyan and Fakir Baba (or Fakir Pir Mohammad), Bade Baba (d. 1925) was born in Malegaon. He arrived in Shirdi in 1909 and appears to have had an earlier connection with Sai Baba, whom he may have met in Aurangabad many years before. Sai Baba held him in high esteem; see Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 380-2 (chap. 23, vv. 112-27); Satpathy, *An Inspiring Life*, 96-9. On Bade Baba – who is said to have received from Sai Baba up to fifty rupees daily – see also Shepherd, *Biographical Investigation*, 175-9; "Remembering Bade Baba", available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w1aoiTCRMRI.

These actions strongly suggest that Sai Baba maintained enduring ties with Sufi figures in Aurangabad, likely originating in his early years.[179] As Nile Green observes:

> The growth of Shams al-dīn's reputation beyond Awrangabad is seen in his connection to the cult of the famous religious teacher Sāī Bābā of Shirdi (d. 1337/1918), who regularly visited Awrangabad during his youth and possibly resided there for several years. Sāī Bābā was an heir to the Sufi traditions of the Hyderabad Deccan, even though the religious politics of independent India would later gradually de-Islamicize his cult and memory. One anecdote from his life describes him sending Qāsim, the son of one of his closest disciples, to Awrangabad to meet Shams al-dīn. According to Qāsim's companion, Imāmbhāī Chōtā Khān, Shams al-dīn was waiting for the pair when they arrived at the newly opened railway station in Awrangabad, a journey of around two miles from the shrine by carriage. According to the account, Shams al-dīn was already mystically aware of Sāī Bābā's command that the pair should present 250 rupees to Shams al-dīn for the performance of praise songs (*mawlūd*, *qawwālī*) at the shrine of Shāh Nūr [d. 1104/1692] for the Prophet Muhammad and the saints. Sāī Bābā had also prepared local unleavened bread (*polī*) and chicken for Shams al-dīn to distribute to the poor at the shrine, in an offering often associated with the saintly shrines of the Deccan.[180]

Sai Baba's association with these Sufis of Aurangabad lends support to the hypothesis that he may have been connected with a Chishtī milieu, although the available evidence remains circumstantial rather than conclusive. The Chishtī brotherhood was well established in this region, and it is known that from an early age Sai Baba was drawn to practices such as the performance of devotional music (*qawwālī*) and ecstatic audition (*samā*).[181] Given that Sai Baba was still a young man during his stay in Aurangabad, identifying the "old *faqīr*" of this narrative with figures such as Shamsuddin Miyan, Banne Miyan, or Bade Baba appears unlikely, though it cannot be categorically ruled out.[182]

The mention of a tall tamarind tree near the mosque in which the *faqīr* resided is not unexpected, as this tree is held in particular reverence among Indian Muslims and is commonly found in the vicinity of shrines and cemeteries. The account further relates that Sai Baba, after an initial refusal – possibly indicative of a probationary or initiatory trial – was eventually accepted by the *faqīr* and undertook the daily task of begging on his behalf, bringing him food for many years in place of an elderly woman. This detail underscores Sai Baba's humility and his capacity for selfless and patient service.

In this narrative, the young Sai Baba emerges as a devoted and caring disciple. Khaparde interprets the episode as a story "calculated to impress the virtue of patience", that is, *saburī*, the cardinal virtue of endurance and contentment that Sai Baba consistently recommended to

179 See Narasimhaswami, *Life of Sai Baba*, 3: 164, 166; Narasimhaswami, *Charters and Sayings*, 136-7.

180 Green, *Indian Sufism*, 117.

181 See Green, *Indian Sufism*, 47, 109-18, 134-41.

182 V.B. Kher has suggested that the *faqīr* whom Sai Baba 'instructed' for twelve years in Aurangabad was none other than Bade Baba; see Kher, *Sai Baba*, 55-9.

his devotees, often in conjunction with *niṣṭhā* (faith).[183] The diarist's moral interpretation – clearly resonant with his own circumstances – was likely shaped by Sai Baba's earlier instruction that he should remain in Shirdi patiently for an additional two months.

Sai Baba's eventual decision to leave the *faqīr* after years of devoted service may be read as marking the attainment of spiritual maturity and independence as a master in his own right. The *faqīr*'s tears attest to his deep affection for his disciple, while Sai Baba's gentle words of consolation reflect his compassion and regard for his teacher. Their subsequent visits to one another in Aurangabad and Shirdi further indicate the enduring strength of their bond, characteristic of the relationship between master and disciple.

If, as reported, this *faqīr* visited Shirdi "a few years ago" and "lodged at the Chavadi" under the care of a certain "Motha Baba Fakir", it is likely that some local residents would have been familiar with him. Unfortunately, Khaparde did not pursue inquiries into the *faqīr*'s identity.

In his concluding remarks, Khaparde writes that "Sayin Baba stayed twelve years to instruct the Aurangabad Fakir and set him up fully in the spiritual world", thereby reversing the apparent roles and recasting Sai Baba as the *guru* and the old *faqīr* as his disciple. The diarist thus appears to have understood Sai Baba's prolonged and devoted service to the *faqīr* as an expression of spiritual mastery: by serving rather than being served, Sai Baba exemplified the paradigm of the true *sadguru*, or perfect master.[184] This perspective plausibly explains Khaparde's interpretation of the narrative as emphasizing the virtue of patience, a quality that Sai Baba would have embodied in his relationship with the *faqīr*.

A similar interpretive tendency is evident in the *Shri Sai Satcharita* – regarded by many Hindu devotees as Sai Baba's "literary embodiment" (chap. 45, v. 9) – which accentuates the saint's willingness, in his early years, to assume the role of disciple to the (putative) master Jawahar Ali, a Sufi from Ahmednagar. This episode serves to underscore Sai Baba's humility and equanimity, while ultimately reaffirming his supreme sanctity and status as *guru*.[185] As the text relates: "Full of compassion for his devotees, Baba said, with utmost humility, 'A slave of slaves that I am, I am indebted to you and have set out to have your *darshan*. It is indeed, by your great kindness that I have met you. I am but a worm in your faeces; by virtue of this position, I am most blessed in this universe'".[186]

A comparable ethical ideal is articulated in the Christian tradition. As Jesus teaches his disciples in *Matthew* 20:26-8: "Among you, whoever wants to be great must be your servant, and whoever would be first must be the willing slave of all – like the Son of Man; he did not come to be served, but to serve, and to surrender his life as a ransom for many".[187]

183 These were the twin virtues that Sai Baba's own *guru* demanded of him, which he is said to have immediately embodied; see Narasimhaswami, *Charters and Sayings*, 43.

184 For a presentation of Sai Baba as a *sadguru*, see Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 781-2 (chap. 48, vv. 1-14). Dabholkar further characterizes Sai Baba as a *niyat guru*, that is, a *guru* ordained by God who pervades the universe in an unmanifest state and incarnates for the benefit of devotees; see *ibid.*, 154 (chap. 10, vv. 65-9).

185 See Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 83-6.

186 Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 156 (chap. 10, vv. 90-1).

187 *The New English Bible: New Testament*, 37.

Taken together, these parallels lend further coherence to Khaparde's interpretation. It is likely that he arrived at this conclusion on the basis of interpretive cues contained in Sai Baba's own account.

> Shirdi, Sunday 31 December 1911
>
> I got up very early in the morning, prayed and was walking in the verandah when "Hamsa" came downstairs and said that he could not sleep well and so wandered out and went to Khandoba temple,[188] then to the house occupied at present by Radhakrishna Bai in the hope of hearing her pray but found that there were no signs of anybody staying in the house. So he wandered about the village gate. Later on he went again and met Radhakrishna Bai. She kindly helped him. So he bathed, prayed and had breakfast *out of the Prasad sent to her by Sayin Maharaj*. I stood talking with him. He went to Radhakrishna Bai again to say goodbye and she gave him a dhoti and a shirt as Prasad. Then he returned to Bombay with the three young men that were with him. The name of one of them was Rege.
> All this made me late for everything and was further delayed by the barber. *I saw Sayin Baba go out but he did not permit anybody to approach him and salute at close quarters*.
> I went to the Masjid later on and sat there to attend the midday worship. During the Arti all the males had to stand today below the platform in the open, leaving the whole Masjid for the ladies. The arrangement was very good.
> On my return I sat talking with the Mamlatdar of Kopargaon who happened to be here. Later on came Mr. Deva, Mamlatdar of Dahanu. Nanasaheb Chandorkar came before Arti. Our breakfast was as usual about 2 PM. After it I sat reading the newspapers received today. The Conventionist Congress does not appear to have been an unqualified success.[189]
> Towards evening I went to the Masjid *but Sayin Maharaj gave 'Udi' soon*. So I sat on the plinth of the new building talking with the Gujarati Shastri who is with Govardhandas. *We saluted Sayin Maharaj when he came out for his usual stroll and again at Shej Arti*. Then we had the Bhajan of Bhishma and Dixit's Ramayan.

188 The pastoral god Khaṇḍobā, regarded as an *avatāra* of Śiva, is worshipped at the Jejuri Temple (the hill fort, *gaḍkoṭ*) in Pune District. A widely venerated figure, he is associated with approximately six hundred temples across the Deccan region. Khaṇḍobā is particularly revered by members of the Dhangar shepherd caste, for whom he serves as a protector of cattle. He is also celebrated as the preeminent deity of *sakāmabhakti*, that is, devotion oriented toward the fulfillment of worldly desires. On Khaṇḍobā, see Sontheimer, *Pastoral Deities in Western India*.

189 Following the Surat split of the Indian National Congress in December 1907, the Conventionist Congress, through its Constitutional Committee, came to represent the Moderates, while the Nationalists established their own Congress Continuation Committee. In time, however, the two factions found it increasingly difficult to function separately. The reunification of the Indian National Congress ultimately took place at the Lucknow session of 1916.

The wanderings of "Hamsa" – together with "the three young men that were with him" – throughout the village, even at night, appear to have been aimed at gathering further information about Sai Baba and Khaparde. His visits to the house of Radhakrishna Bai, which he had already frequented on 28 December, were likely motivated by his recognition of her close relationship with the saint – as evidenced by the fact that Sai Baba sent her *prasād* daily – and of her prominent role within the devotional community. It was largely through her initiatives that the *ārtī*s and the cult of the *faqīr* were organized and sustained. By gaining her confidence, "Hamsa" sought to obtain deeper insight into Sai Baba and the factors that drew Khaparde and numerous others to him.

In this respect, his efforts appear to have been successful. Radhakrishna Bai conversed with him, shared Sai Baba's *prasād*, and showed him considerable kindness, even presenting him with a *dhotī* and a shirt. Apparently having accomplished his task, "Hamsa" departed from Shirdi that day with his three associates, informing Khaparde that he needed to return to Bombay. By this point, it is likely that other agents had already arrived in the village with the purpose of observing and reporting on the words and actions of both Khaparde and Sai Baba.

In the morning, the saint "did not permit anybody to approach him and salute at close quarters", while in the evening he "gave *udī* soon", that is, earlier than usual, thereby leaving little or no time for devotees to interact with him. Consequently, visitors were obliged to content themselves with a relatively brief *darśan*. It is also noteworthy that during the midday *ārtī*, "all the males had to stand […] below the platform in the open, leaving the whole Masjid for the ladies". This arrangement attests to the prominent presence of women among Sai Baba's devotees and reveals a clear spatial separation between male and female participants.

Although Sai Baba generally adhered to a more or less fixed routine, he remained highly unpredictable and could alter his schedule abruptly, often without any apparent reason. The villagers and those in close proximity to him were well aware of this tendency and exercised considerable caution in their day-to-day interactions with him. Even when in a congenial mood, he could "laugh and abuse in one and the same breath", as Khaparde would note a few days later. The *Shri Sai Satcharita* similarly observes (chap. 10, v. 27): "Sometimes he treated people with great affection; sometimes he charged at them, stone in hand. There was a volley of curses and abuses, on occasions, as there was an embrace of blissful joy on other occasions".[190] The presence and movements of detectives in Shirdi may well have been among the factors that disturbed him considerably.

190 Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 150-1. See for instance the story of Siddique Phalake, a Muslim resident of Kalyan; *ibid.*, 172-5 (chap. 11, vv. 77-113).

> Shirdi, Monday 1 January 1912
>
> I got up early in the morning and went to the Chavadi for Kakad Arti. *I saw Sayin Maharaj's face as the first thing and it was full of sweet grace. I was very much delighted.* After we returned to the Wada, I saw Upasani's brother.[191] He has come from Dhulia.[192] I saw him at Poona and Amravati before. He went to see Sayin Maharaj and *was told about people bringing ties with them from a former birth and meeting now in consequence of them.*
> ***He told the story of a former birth in which he,[193] Bapusaheb Jog, Dada Kelkar, Madhavrao Deshpande, myself and Dixit were associated and lived in a blind alley. There was his Murshad there. He has now brought us together again.***
> *I saw him go out* and then sat reading Ramayan. *I saw him again at midday Arti, and was very kind to me.*
> Dixit gave a 'Naivedya'[194] today and we had all our meals with him. I sat with Vaidya, Nanasaheb Chandorkar, Mr. Deva Mamlatdar of Dahanu and others.
> I sat reading again and then went to see Sayin Saheb at the Masjid. *He first dismissed me along with the rest, but called me again, saying that I was anxious to run away.*
> In the evening *we saw him opposite the Chavadi* and had at night the Bhajan of Bhishma and Dixit's Ramayan. Bala Shimpi[195] came to the Bhajan.

In the opening lines of this entry, Khaparde's *bhakti* is readily apparent, as is his delight in receiving Sai Baba's *darśan*. The "first thing" he saw at dawn, during the celebration of the *kākaḍ ārtī* in the *cāvaḍī*, was the saint's face, "full of sweet grace" – an auspicious beginning to the new year.

At the mosque, Sai Baba explicitly informs Upasani's brother, a Sanskrit scholar, that what brings individuals together in their present birth is *ṛṇānubandha*, that is, karmic ties and debts carried over from previous lives.[196]

191 The Brahmin Balkrishna Govind Upasani Shastri, a Sanskrit professor in Pune, was the brother of Upasani 'Vaidya', later known as Upasani Maharaj. On Balkrishna Govind Upasani Shastri and his interaction with the Shirdi *faqīr*, see Narasimhaswami, *Devotees' Experiences*, 228-30. It is reported that Sai Baba once told him: "I was at the battle in which the Rani of Jhansi took part. I was then in the army"; Narasimhaswami, *Charters and Sayings*, 209. On the hypothesis that the *faqīr* was involved in the Sepoy Rebellion of 1857-58, see Shepherd, *Biographical Investigation*, 13-14.

192 Also known as Dhule, it is located in the north-western part of Maharashtra, in West Khandesh.

193 Sai Baba, not Upasani's brother.

194 Dixit made all the arrangements for that day's meal and bore the expense. As was customary, the food was first offered to Sai Baba and, after he had tasted and blessed it, it was distributed among the devotees.

195 The villager Bala Ganpat Shimpi, also known as Bala Simpi, was Sai Baba's tailor and used to stitch his robes (*kafnīs*); see Kamath, Kher, *Sai Baba of Shirdi*, 155; Chitluri, *Baba's Rinanubandh*, 68. Sai Baba is reported to have cured him of malarial fever by ordering him to feed a black dog near the local Lakṣmī temple; see Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 205-6 (chap. 13, vv. 88-97).

196 For the story of two goats whom Sai Baba identified as having been human in a former birth – namely, two brothers associated with him – see Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 759-63 (chap. 46, vv. 91-135). See also the account of the snake Vīrabhadrappa and the frog Chanabasappa, likewise described as humans in a previous birth; *ibid.*, 764-80 (chap. 47). In both cases, rebirth as animals is attributed to their greed for money. The sources report numerous instances of Sai Baba telling individuals that they had been associated with him in past lives; see *ibid.*, 851 (chap. 51, v. 206). For a survey, see Chitluri, *Baba's Rinanubandh*. See also Satpathy, *An Inspiring Life*, 199-210.

The *faqīr* then recounts a story from one of his former lives in which he was associated with Khaparde and four other prominent devotees. In doing so, Sai Baba emphasizes his special connection with certain individuals, suggesting that their present bond is far from incidental, and instead extends across multiple lifetimes. Khaparde and these other *bhakta*s would likely have been gratified to learn that their association with Sai Baba originated in a distant past.

The *faqīr* further remarks that they had all lived in a blind alley, a detail that underscores their proximity to him. At the same time, this image lends itself to a symbolic interpretation, possibly indicating a state of spiritual stagnation or impasse. Significantly, Sai Baba's teacher is also said to have lived in this same blind alley. He is identified as Sai Baba's *murshad*, a term that unequivocally designates him as a Sufi master. The inclusion of the *murshad* appears to be decisive within the narrative: it is implied that, under the enlightened guidance of his master, Sai Baba was able to attain his present spiritual status, find his way out of the "blind alley", and ultimately achieve communion with Allāh.

The broader implication is that a spiritual guide is indispensable to the acquisition of true knowledge and the attainment of the highest goal. Without a *guru*, the individual is portrayed as remaining trapped in ignorance and facing spiritual ruin. Sai Baba has now brought his former companions together once more, gathering them around himself as their spiritual master. Just as his *murshad* had guided him in a previous life, he now assumes full responsibility for them, steadfastly committed to leading them toward their ultimate destination – union with God. Although the subject of the statement "He has now brought us together again" could, in principle, refer to the *murshad*, it is highly likely that the diarist intended "Sayin Maharaj". While this interpretation is persuasive, the narrative may also reflect a hagiographical tendency to recast Sai Baba's earlier subordination as a form of implicit or concealed mastery.

In the afternoon, wishing to be left alone, the *faqīr* dismissed everyone from the mosque; in doing so, however, he summoned Khaparde and gently reproved him for his eagerness to "run away" from Shirdi and resume his professional and political activities. In this way, Sai Baba reminded Khaparde of the need to relinquish his concerns and to surrender himself completely to the saint's will.

Shirdi, Tuesday 2 January 1912

I got up very early in the morning. Upasani's brother, who came yesterday, went away before day break. After I finished my prayer Kaka Mahajani, Atre and others went. More went later on. C.V. Vaidya went after midday Arti, with three other gentlemen.
Nanasaheb Chandorkar held a Dhanurmas[197] and all were invited. After meals it was that C.V. Vaidya went. Mankar, Mamlatdar of Kopargaon and Deva, Mamlatdar of Dahanu, also went then. Later on, after sunset, Nanasaheb Chandorkar went with all his family. So the Wada, which during these few days used to look full and very pleasant, is comparatively

197 This refers to the period during which the sun is in Sagittarius, falling between mid-December and mid-January, when various rituals and offerings are performed.

empty now and we miss company.
We saw Sayin Maharaj when he came out for a stroll and again at Shej Arti.
My son Baba and Gopalrao Dorle came this morning to take me to Amravati. I said my departure depended on the permission of Sayin Maharaj. *They saw Sayin Maharaj and said there was no difficulty about the permission.*
Bhishma is not well today, so there was no Bhajan.
Ram Maruti wished to go away today but *Sayin Baba detained him.*
There was Ramayan and Bhagavat read at night.

On this day, many people departed from the village, and Khaparde notes that Dixit's *vāḍā* was now "comparatively empty", a circumstance that understandably heightened his sense of loneliness. It was difficult for him to watch his companions leave after obtaining Sai Baba's permission – with the exception of Ram Maruti, who was "detained" in Shirdi – while he himself was required to remain, despite the pressing matters awaiting him in Amravati. As the *faqīr* had cautioned him the previous day, his "anxiety to run away", prompted by his professional and political responsibilities, was strong; yet he was expected to restrain it and to internalize the lesson of patience by surrendering himself at his *guru*'s feet. Outwardly, at least, Khaparde appears to have maintained composure, remaining focused on Sai Baba and the spiritual routine of the place. It is noteworthy that in his diary he does not voice any explicit complaint regarding his situation.

When his elder son Balkrishna, together with Gopalrao Dorle – one of Khaparde's assistants – arrived in Shirdi with the intention of bringing him back to Amravati, Khaparde simply replied that his departure was not within his control but depended upon "the permission of Sayin Maharaj". The two men then went to the mosque to plead his case before the *faqīr*, who surprised them by stating candidly that there would be "no difficulty about the permission". This response led them to assume that no obstacles remained and that authorization to leave Shirdi would soon be granted. In retrospect, however, the episode may be interpreted as one of Sai Baba's *līlā*s, that is, as an instance of his characteristically enigmatic and playful mode of interaction.

Shirdi, Wednesday 3 January 1912

In the morning I got up early, attended the Kakad Arti and finished my prayer. My son Baba and Gopalrao Dorle went to Sayin Maharaj *and asked for permission to return to Amravati. Sayin Maharaj replied that all may return.* So my son Baba and Gopalrao Dorle returned in great joy. They told me, so I went with Madhavrao Deshpande and Sayin Maharaj *confirmed the permission but, as we were returning, he overtook us near the Khind*[198] *and said that we may start tomorrow.*
I saw him when he was going out and again after he returned to the Masjid. Madhavrao started the subject about my departure and *Sayin Maharaj replied that I had my houses both here and at Amravati and I may stay where I like and I may never return to Amravati.* That settled the matter, so it appeared to me, and I told my son Baba and Gopalrao

198 The gate of the mosque.

> Dorle to return to Amravati. So they made ready and went to say 'goodbye' and received the blessings of Sayin Maharaj when *the latter told them to go tomorrow. In the afternoon, he said he would give all of my family permission to return tomorrow.*
> Megha fed some Brahmins today in completion of his Anusthana[199] of a Gayatri Purascharana.[200] We had our meal with him. The meal was served in Sathe's Wada.
> In the afternoon, *I saw Sayin Maharaj both at the Masjid and when he came out for his usual stroll. He was in a very pleased mood and laughed and abused in one and the same breath.*
> At night there was the Bhajan of Bhishma and Dixit's Ramayan of which two chapters were read.
> Tatya Patil's father died in the evening.

Sai Baba appears to deal with Khaparde in an elusive and somewhat paradoxical manner. Initially, he informs Khaparde's son and Gopalrao Dorle that they may all return to Amravati that very day. Subsequently, however, when Khaparde himself seeks confirmation at the mosque, accompanied by the intermediary Madhavrao Deshpande, the *faqīr* states that they "may start tomorrow". When Madhavrao raises the matter once more, Sai Baba further remarks that Khaparde "may never return to Amravati", a statement that Khaparde interprets as an injunction to remain in Shirdi. It is noteworthy that the *faqīr* also remarked that Khaparde had a house in Shirdi, thereby suggesting that Shirdi, rather than Amravati, constituted his true abode.

Khaparde further records that, in the afternoon, Sai Baba "was in a very pleased mood and laughed and abused in one and the same breath", a remark that illustrates the saint's unpredictability. The coexistence of laughter and abusive language may appear striking, if not paradoxical. The precise cause and intended object of such expressions, however, remain unclear. One might speculate that Sai Baba's laughter reflected his awareness of the situation – perhaps even the playful nature of his interaction with Khaparde – while his simultaneous use of abusive language was directed toward perceived malevolent forces, such as agents of the colonial administration, who were thought to threaten Khaparde. Alternatively, it may have been connected to the impending death of Tatya Kote Patil's father, who is known to have been dear to the saint. Such interpretations, however, remain conjectural, as Sai Baba did not provide explicit explanations for the emotional states he displayed.[201]

199 A ritual performance.

200 The *gāyatrī* (*Ṛgveda* 3.62.10) is regarded by many Hindus as the most sacred and powerful *mantra*. It comprises twenty-four syllables: *tat savitur vareṇyaṃ bhargo devasya dhīmahi dhiyo yo naḥ pracodayāt*, that is, 'Let us meditate on that excellent glory of the divine vivifying Sun; may he enlighten our understanding'. A *gāyatrī puraścaraṇa* consists in the repetition (*japa*) of this *mantra* twenty-four lakhs of times. On the *gāyatrī*, see Panikkar, *The Vedic Experience*, 38-43.

201 According to Sai Baba's servant and close devotee Abdul, the saint's insults were blessings in disguise. As we read: "The meanings of some of His abuses are as follows: *Thu kutha hai* ('You are a dog') means have faith and contentment like a dog; *Thu gadha hai* ('You are a donkey') means serve without expecting any reward; *Thu jalja* ('May you get burned') means may all the bad qualities in you be burned; *Thu marja* ('May you die') means may the ego in you die; *Thu sathyanash hoja* ('May you be destroyed') means may all the six vices in you be destroyed. May you turn into a devotee filled with purity and devoid of bad qualities" (Peddabottu, *Autobiography*, 122).

Shirdi, Thursday 4 January 1912

I got up early in the morning, prayed and wished my son Baba and Gopalrao Dorle to go to Sayin Maharaj and obtain permission to return to Amravati, but my wife intervened saying it was Pausha Purnima[202] and therefore a day sacred to our family deity, so no endeavor was made to obtain the permission required.
I saw him go out as usual and went to the Masjid after he returned, spending the interval in reading Ramayan.
We returned after the midday Arti, and after meals I sat talking with Bapusaheb Jog and then resumed Ramayan.
After 5 PM I went to Sayin Maharaj in the Masjid and *found him walking about in the compound*. My wife also came there. *After a time, he took his usual seat and we sat near him*.
Dixit and his wife also came.
Sayin Maharaj then told a story. He said there was a princess living in a palace. A 'Mang' sought shelter with her. Her sister-in-law who was there also, refused it to the Mang. So the Mang with his wife was returning disconsolate to his village when he met Alla-Minya[203] on the way and told his story, how, stricken with poverty, he sought shelter and was refused. Alla-Minya advised him to return with his wife and seek shelter once more with the same princess. He did so and was admitted and treated like a member of the family. The Mang stayed enjoying all the comforts for over six months and then, coveting gold, murdered the princess with an axe. The people round about assembled in large numbers and held a panchayat. The Mang admitted the offence when the matter went to the king in due course. Alla-Minya advised him to let the Mang go. The king obeyed. The princess murdered by the Mang came to be born of him as his daughter and he came once more to the palace and was permitted to stay there in affluence and ease for twelve years. Then Alla-Minya inclined the king to avenge the murdered princess and the Mang was killed in the same way in which he had killed the princess. The Mang's widow returned to her village, accepting the Mang's fate as just. The princess who was born as daughter to the Mang came to the place, took possession of what belonged to her in the former reincarnation and lived happily afterwards. There was the work of God done and His justice vindicated.
There was Shej Arti at night, then Bhishma's Bhajan and Dixit's Ramayan. *Ram Maruti today embraced Sayin Maharaj when the latter was going in procession to Chavadi for the Shej Arti*.

202 The full moon (*pūrṇimā*) of the lunar month of Pauṣa, which falls between December and January, is traditionally observed through fasting and the performance of the Satyanārāyaṇa *pūjā*, dedicated to Viṣṇu. It is believed that bathing in sacred waters, making donations to the poor, and offering *prasād* to the sun on this day can absolve individuals of sin and lead to spiritual liberation.

203 Alla-Minya or Allahmiya is a misspelling of Allāh Miyān. Miyān is a term of respect, roughly equivalent to 'sir' or 'mister', often appended to the names of Sufi masters as well as to Allāh. Thus, in chap. 11, v. 96 of the *Shri Sai Satcharita*, Sai Baba tells Madhavrao Deshpande: "Can anyone step up to this mosque without being Allahmiya's debtor? Inscrutable are the ways of this Fakir here. Over Him, I have no control"; Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 173.

On this day, Khaparde expressed the wish that at least his son and Gopalrao Dorle might obtain permission to leave Shirdi and return home. His wife, Shrimati Lakshmibai, however, objected on the grounds that, as the day was a holiday sacred to their family deity (*kuladevatā*), it would be inappropriate to trouble Sai Baba with such a request.

In the afternoon, when Khaparde went to the mosque to see the *faqīr*, he found him "walking about in the compound", apparently in a pensive mood. After some time, however, Sai Baba ceased pacing, "took his usual seat", and began to narrate a most intriguing tale. Khaparde and his wife were once again privileged to "sit near" him.

The protagonist of the narrative is Allāh Miyān, who appears to represent a Sufi saint – possibly Sai Baba himself – conceived as being united with Allāh. In the story, he assumes the dual role of adviser to the Māṅg and intercessor before the king, who represents the princess's father and, symbolically, Allāh. Initially, the destitute Māṅg and his wife are denied entry to the magnificent palace – Allāh's kingdom – by the princess's sister-in-law, a stern gatekeeper figure who may be understood as symbolizing ignorance and, possibly, caste-based exclusion in light of the couple's untouchable status. Allāh Miyān, however, who regards all beings with impartiality, has compassion for them. Encountering them on their return to their village, he listens to their plight and advises them to go back to the palace and once again seek refuge there.

In Sufi thought, the process by which Allāh reveals himself in manifest forms – through his names and attributes – is referred to as *tajallī* ('disclosure'). Trusting in Allāh Miyān, the Māṅg and his wife follow his counsel and, on this occasion, are admitted into the palace – presumably by the princess herself, who may be interpreted as embodying spiritual sovereignty or divine wisdom – where they are treated hospitably as members of the household. They enjoy comfort and abundance for more than six months. At a certain point, however, the Māṅg succumbs to greed upon seeing the wealth of the palace and murders the princess with an axe in order to steal her gold.

This episode closely resembles a tale narrated by Sai Baba a week earlier, on 29 December 1911, concerning a destitute young man who had been generously received at the house of Sai Baba's father but subsequently absconded with its goods. In both narratives, the father's house and the palace appear to function symbolically as Allāh's abundant abode, that is, his heavenly kingdom.

Following his crime, the Māṅg is swiftly apprehended and confesses before the *pañcāyat*, the village council. When brought before the king – representing Allāh as the ultimate arbiter – he faces a death sentence. At this juncture, Allāh Miyān intervenes, prompting the king to spare his life and grant him a temporary reprieve. This suspension of punishment can be interpreted as allowing for the maturation of karmic retribution: the slain princess is reborn as the Māṅg's daughter, whom he raises. Thereafter, the Māṅg, his wife, and their daughter return to the palace, where they live in abundance for twelve years – a period that may symbolically denote completeness and perhaps function as karmic compensation for their prior suffering, as well as a restoration of the princess's rightful status.

Nevertheless, *karma* remains inescapable, and in due course the Māṅg must face the consequences of his actions. Allāh Miyān again intervenes, this time inspiring the king to carry out justice by ordering the Māṅg's

execution, which mirrors the manner of the princess's death.[204] Following this, the widow departs from the palace and returns alone to her village, acknowledging the justice of her husband's fate. Her acceptance serves to underscore, within the narrative, the impartiality of divine justice. Notably, the daughter – the reborn princess – remains in the palace, and upon reaching maturity, regains full possession of what was originally hers, thus bringing the narrative full circle.

The tale as a whole can be seen to articulate a vision of divine mercy and justice, with Allāh functioning as the guarantor of the law of *karma*. The karmic trajectory of each individual is presented as part of a complex and interconnected continuum extending across multiple births. The underlying teaching may be read as suggesting that each person ultimately bears responsibility for his or her actions and will, sooner or later, reap the consequences of those actions. Ethical conduct is therefore imperative: one must strive to overcome greed and worldly attachment through constant remembrance of Allāh. Only in this way, the narrative suggests, can one attain lasting communion with the divine.

This narrative further illustrates the centrality of *karma* in Sai Baba's teachings, closely linked to the principle of divine justice. The implication appears to be that acts of violence inevitably entail corresponding retribution.[205] At the same time, the story suggests that only unconditional and selfless love possesses the capacity to transcend the cycle of *karma* and bring an end to the suffering inherent in *saṃsāra*. Khaparde's concluding remark – "there was the work of God done and His justice vindicated" – may be taken to encapsulate this interpretation, particularly in light of Sai Baba's characteristic reluctance to offer explicit explanations.

While this reading is persuasive, it should be noted that the narrative, as preserved in Khaparde's diary, may also reflect a didactic or hagiographical shaping of Sai Baba's teachings.

Finally, the diarist notes that "Ram Maruti today embraced Sayin Maharaj when the latter was going in procession to Chavadi for the Shej Arti". This gesture is noteworthy, as physical contact with one's *guru*, especially an embrace, was generally considered inappropriate; devotees would typically seek permission to perform *pādnamaskār*, that is, to touch the *guru*'s feet. Sai Baba, however, did not object to Ram Maruti's spontaneous expression of devotion and appears to have accepted it. According to Khaparde's diary, Ram Maruti's given name was Trimbakrao, although Sai Baba addressed him as Maruti or Ram Maruti. He appears to have been an emotionally expressive devotee, reputedly endowed with exorcistic abilities.

204 Even in the parables attributed to Jesus, one encounters pronouncements of severe punishment: "But as for those enemies of mine who did not want me for their king, bring them here and slaughter them in my presence" (*Luke* 19:27); "What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and put these tenants to death and let the vineyard to others" (*Luke* 20:15-16); *The New English Bible: New Testament*, 136-37. In Sai Baba's narratives, alongside God's love for his creatures, one likewise perceives an emphasis on the ineluctability of divine justice and judgment.

205 If Sai Baba's teaching is understood as fundamentally moral, Kevin R.D. Shepherd's assertion that "no religious doctrine was involved" (Shepherd, *Faqir of Shirdi*, 136) appears somewhat misleading, given that the narrative is structured around the principle of karmic retribution.

> Shirdi, Friday 5 January 1912
>
> In the morning I got up early though I did not sleep well at night.
> I attended the Kakad Arti. *Sayin Maharaj was in a pleased mood*. My son Baba and Gopalrao Dorle went to him. *On seeing them, he said "go"*. Taking this as permission to return they hired Baba Bhau's Tonga and went away.
> I prayed and *saw Sayin Maharaj go out and again after he returned. He was in very good mood*. Many people came.
> After the midday Arti, and after the usual meal, I lay down for a while and then sat listening to Ramayan read by Dixit. Upasani, Bhishma and Madhavrao were also present.
> Then about 5 PM *I went to see Sayin Maharaj with Bhishma and my son Balvant. He told how he was not well and humorously described his ailments*. Balabhau Joshi brought parched gram. *Sayin Maharaj ate a few and distributed the rest*.
> *Then we stood near the Chavadi when he came out for his stroll*, and then we had the usual Arti in the Wada, Bhishma's Bhajan and Dixit's Ramayan of which two chapters were read.
> Today some people from Dhulia came and went.
> The […] with the ailing girl *got permission to return today*.[206]

In the early morning, the saint, who was in a "very good mood", finally granted permission to depart to both Babasaheb and Gopalrao Dorle. Upon seeing them, he uttered the decisive word *jā*, that is, 'go', and they immediately left by *ṭoṅgā*. The diarist further notes that "many people" arrived in Shirdi, suggesting that a considerable number of visitors were likely accommodated at Dixit's *vāḍā*.

In the afternoon, when Khaparde, together with his son Balvant and Bhishma, went to see Sai Baba, the diarist records that the saint "was not well and humorously described his ailments". As he had done during his first visit to Shirdi, in his entry dated 5 December 1910, Khaparde again records the *faqīr*'s statement that he was unwell. It appears that the saint's health was gradually deteriorating. Nevertheless, Sai Baba displayed remarkable fortitude, speaking in public about his ailments with levity and even making light of them.

The "parched gram" presented by one Balabhau Joshi to the *faqīr* refers to roasted chickpeas, a common food item in the region. Roasted gram is traditionally believed to aid digestion and to expel harmful substances from the body.[207] Sai Baba accepted the offering by consuming a small portion and distributed the remainder as *prasād* among the devotees present at the mosque.

Finally, Khaparde records that an individual who had come to Shirdi with his "ailing girl" received permission to return home. It may be inferred that this person had sought a miraculous cure for his daughter.

206 The final sentence is somewhat unclear in the original manuscript; the first word after 'The' appears to be 'person': "The person with the ailing girl got permission to return today".

207 See Chitluri, *Baba's Vaani*, 132-3.

> Shirdi, Saturday 6 January 1912
>
> I got up in the morning a little before daybreak and finished my prayer as usual and *saw Sayin Maharaj go out. After he passed on*, I went to Balasaheb Bhate and borrowed from him his copy of Ranganath Swami's Yogavasishta[208] in Marathi and returned to my lodgings, but resumed the reading of Ramayan.
> We all there attended the midday Arti and had our meals as usual. I did not wish to lie down but somehow sleep overcame me and I slept for two hours nearly.
> Then Dixit read Ramayan and later on *I went to the Masjid and saw Sayin Maharaj. He was in a pleased mood and there was talk.*
> In the evening there was the usual Wada Arti and later on we attended the Shej Arti at the Chavadi. *Sayin Maharaj was in an exceptionally pleased mood, made mystic signs to Megha, and did what are known as 'Drishti pata' in Yoga.*
> An astrologer has come from Dhulia and is a guest of Upasani and is staying in the Wada.
> At night there was Bhishma's Bhajan and the Ramayan of Dixit.

Khaparde again notes that, in the afternoon at the mosque, Sai Baba was "in a pleased mood" and conversed with the devotees present, though he unfortunately provides no details regarding the content of this "talk". Later in the evening – either during the procession to the *cāvaḍī* or at the *cāvaḍī* itself during the *śej ārtī* – Khaparde reports that "Sayin Maharaj was in an exceptionally pleased mood, made mystic signs to Megha, and did what are known as 'Drishti pata' in Yoga". The *faqīr*'s "mystic signs", consisting of movements of his hands, arms, or head, constitute a notable feature of his enigmatic persona. As one devotee remarked: "Who can know why Baba does what He does? He is mysterious, and an enigma".[209]

Several devotees observed Sai Baba's habitual use of gestures. Mrs. Tara Bai Sadasiva Tarkhad records: "He would sit in the mornings near his Dhuni, i.e., fire, and wave his arms and fingers about, making gestures which conveyed no meaning to us, and saying… 'Haq', i.e., God".[210] Similarly, another account notes: "[N]othing could surpass the manifest divinity in Sai Baba's expression, when he made a halt of about five minutes in front of the Chavadi looking towards the sky and making signs with his right hand before the procession entered the Chavadi. Indeed, a sight celestial for the worldly mortals to see!"[211] The *Shri Sai Satcharita* (chap. 37, v. 157) likewise reports: "Amid the twanging and clanging of musical instruments, Maharaj, his heart full of joy, would move his right hand up and down, repeatedly".[212] Another passage describes how, upon reaching the *cāvaḍī*, "Baba would stop

208 Raṅganātha's Marāṭhī summary of the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, an Advaita Vedānta text composed between the 9th and 12th centuries CE. The *Yogavāsiṣṭha* employs the narrative framework of the *Rāmāyaṇa* to present a dialogue between Lord Rāma and the sage Vasiṣṭha on the nature of Advaita and Yoga.

209 Chitluri, *Baba's Rinanubandh*, 67.

210 Narasimhaswami, *Devotees' Experiences*, 74.

211 Pradhan, *Shri Sai Baba of Shirdi*, 46. See also Mehta, *Purna Parabrahma*, 32-3.

212 Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 618. See also *ibid*., 619 (chap. 37, v. 164).

and, facing the north, would make some gestures with his hands… Facing the north with a concentrated mind, he seemed to be calling someone, half raising his right hand".[213]

It is noteworthy that Sai Baba regularly paused before the Hanumān (Mārutī) temple on his way to the *cāvaḍī*, uttering words and making gestures while waving his arms. Narasimhaswami records that Sai Baba once explained: "My father dedicated me to Maruti. I make gestures before his temple telling him I am his brother".[214] Khaparde, however, does not provide further details regarding the nature of the signs made while the saint was "in an exceptionally pleased mood", nor did Sai Baba offer explanations – either to Megha Shyam, to whom they were directed, or to others present. One might speculate that these gestures were connected to Megha's impending death, which occurred less than two weeks later, on 19 January 1912; however, such an interpretation remains conjectural.[215]

Khaparde further notes that the saint "did what are known as 'Drishti pata' in Yoga". Tantric sources, such as the nineteenth chapter of the *Netra Tantra* (ca. 825 CE), discuss *dṛṣṭipāta*, or the "casting of the gaze".[216] When interviewed by Narasimhaswami in June 1936, Justice M.B. Rege reported that Sai Baba's glance could render a person powerless, causing him or her to sink "like a lump of lead".[217] The saint frequently fixed individuals with an intense gaze, which some Hindu observers associated with *dṛṣṭi*, or concentrated gazing, a practice linked to Haṭha Yoga.[218] Such interpretations, however, should not lead to the conclusion that Sai Baba was a practitioner of Tantra or Yoga. As Kevin R.D. Shepherd has noted, "the reference to 'yogic glances' has led some readers to mistakenly assume that Sai Baba was a Yogi. Khaparde was trying to describe the phenomenon by using terms well known in his milieu".[219] Indeed, Sai Baba did not teach *yoga*, nor can he be readily classified as a *yogin*, despite hagiographic portrayals that extol him as perpetually established in *samādhi*.[220]

213 Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita,* 853-4 (chap. 51, vv. 237, 240). See also *ibid.*, 618 (chap. 37, v. 156).

214 Narasimhaswami, *Charters and Sayings*, 9. See also Satpathy, *An Inspiring Life*, 53. Sai Baba revered Mārutī – the devoted monkey companion of Rāma and Sītā in the *Rāmāyaṇa* – and is reported in some accounts to have been occasionally possessed by him. On Hanumān/Mārutī, one of the most widely worshipped deities in the Hindu pantheon, see Lutgendorf, *Hanuman's Tale*.

215 Rajaram Pagadala observes: "Baba's unintended gestures as seen by some of his devotees were full of divine intentions and practical meaning. Baba quite often exhibited the importance of events that were to occur through his sign language and his body movements. He expressed his commands by the movement of his fingers and hands, thus showing the meaning of emotions symbolically. By this, he communicated to the onlookers and devotees and revealed his thoughts and showered his blessings. Baba by his gesture was controlling the universe" (Pagadala, *Sri Saibaba's Charters and Sayings*).

216 Here, *dṛṣṭipāta* refers to the evil eye; see White, *Dæmons Are Forever*, 52 ff.

217 See Narasimhaswami, *Devotees' Experiences*, 11.

218 See the episodes reported in Chitluri, *Baba's Divine Symphony*, 65-6, 74, and Chitluri, *Baba's Vaani*, 54-6, 125. On *dṛṣṭi*, see Piano, *Enciclopedia dello yoga*, 101-2; Feuerstein, *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Yoga*, 102-3.

219 Shepherd, *Faqir of Shirdi*, 136.

220 See Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 555 (chap. 34, v. 12), 710 (chap. 43, vv. 59, 63-4), 712 (chap. 43, v. 78), 721 (chap. 43, v. 184), 726 (chap. 44, vv. 45-6, 51-5), 727-9 (chap. 44, vv. 62-94), 732 (chap. 44, v. 125), 739 (chap. 45, v. 8), 869 (chap. 53, v. 44). On Sai Baba and *yoga*, see Rigopoulos, "Sāī Bābā and Yoga Powers".

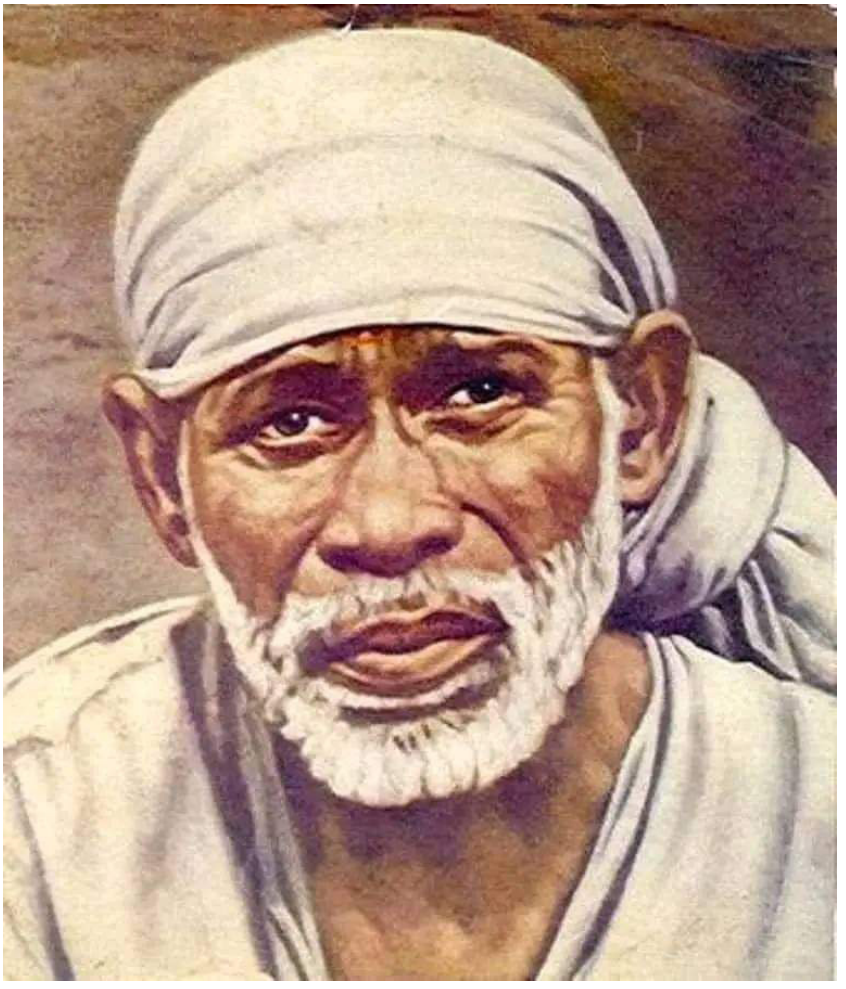

Figure 36 Close-up of a well-known portrait of Sai Baba

The transformative power attributed to a saint's gaze is, however, well attested in Sufi traditions, where it is referred to as *naẓar*. Significantly, this term appears in the morning *ārtī* (*kākaḍ ārtī*) sung daily in Shirdi.[221] Sai Baba's eyes are frequently described as luminous and penetrating, capable of effecting profound transformation in those upon whom they were fixed.[222] He directed his gaze not only toward individuals but also toward inanimate objects – such as his own portrait[223] or photograph[224] – "enlivening" them through his glance, touch, or embrace,[225] and even toward space, including the cardinal directions. Mrs. Tarkhad recalls:

> There was such power and penetration in the glance that none could continue to look at his eyes. One felt that Sai Baba was reading him or her through and through. Soon one lowered one's eyes and bowed down. One felt that he was not only in one's heart but in every atom of one's body. […] He was the *Antaryami* [Inner Ruler], call him God or Satpurusha [Perfect One] […] [I]n his presence, no doubts, no fears, no questioning had any place, and one resigned oneself and found that was the only course, the safest and best course.[226]

Narasimhaswami similarly recounts that when Balasaheb Bhate visited Sai Baba in 1909,

> the very look of Baba pierced and transfixed him. He sat for half an hour, then for an hour, and when reminded by those near him that it was time to move away, had not the slightest inclination to move […] it was with difficulty that he was pulled away from Baba. Here is a case of what we may term to be fascination.[227]

221 This occurs in the *rahama najara* (= *naẓar*) section of the *kākaḍ ārtī*; see Briz-Kishore, *Solemn Pledge*, 93.

222 The *Shri Sai Satcharita* (chap. 24, v. 129) states that the eyes of Sai Baba "shone in the daylight, like those of a cat in darkness"; Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 402. See also Warren, *Unravelling the Enigma*, 251; Chitluri, *Baba's Divine Symphony*, 74; Chitluri, *Baba's Rinanubandh*, 178, 180.

223 In general, the *faqīr* did not approve of the making of his portraits, and devotees were aware that he might react with anger upon seeing them. Characteristically unpredictable, he could either destroy a portrait (or have it destroyed) or spare it and present it to someone as a token of his blessing; see Chitluri, *Baba's Vaani*, 82. An illustrative episode occurred on 7 June 1914, when a Bombay artist named M. Radhakrishna Rao produced a sketch of him. When his close devotee Madhavrao Deshpande asked whether he wished to see it, Sai Baba, even before he could finish speaking, reportedly roared: "'Where is the portrait? Bring it before me. Why are you making my portrait? Bring it at once!' The devotees meekly brought the portrait and placed it before Baba. Rolling his eyes, he picked up his *satka* (Baton) and lunged towards the portrait, and was about to strike it. But suddenly he became calm. Shama said, '*Deva*, what is to be done with the portrait?' The devotees were standing transfixed and waiting. Baba looked in all four directions, and at every devotee that was present there. Chottu Bhaya was standing next to Baba. Baba turned towards him and said softly, 'Take this portrait with you, and everything of yours will become gold'" (Chitluri, *Baba's Vaani*, 51).

224 Sai Baba generally did not permit himself to be photographed; see Chitluri, *Baba's Vaani*, 59, 123. On occasion, however, he relented and allowed devotees to take his photograph; see *ibid*., 33-4. Sources further report that he sometimes sent his photograph to devotees, instructing them to perform daily *pūjā* to it; see *ibid*., 154-6.

225 See Chitluri, *Baba's Vaani*, 44.

226 Narasimhaswami, *Devotees' Experiences*, 67. See also Ganpatrao G. Narke's testimony: "The first impression I got of Sai Baba was from his eyes. They *pierced me through and through*"; *ibid*., 15.

227 Narasimhaswami, *Life of Sai Baba*, 4: 34.

Even the Parsi master Meher Baba (1894-1969),[228] who first met Sai Baba in December 1915, emphasized the extraordinary quality of his eyes. Abdul Ghani Munsiff reports:

> Avatar Meher Baba used to say that Sai Baba had lustrous eyes. The light in his eyes attracted most persons towards him. All Perfect Ones are unique. If there was a physical characteristic that set him above other men, it was his eyes. The eyes of this Perfect One were so luminous, with such power and deep penetration in his gaze that no one could look into them for long. One felt that he was reading the story of the soul from the time of his creation; nothing could be kept secret from that gaze. Once those eyes beheld one, that look was never forgotten. After seeing his face and eyes, people could only bow to him in worship as their Lord.[229]

Moreover:

> The radiance emanating from Sai's countenance, as he stood in front of the *Chavadi*, was like the brilliant glow of red-hot gold – a glow that overspreads the sky at dawn and in the evening. The radiance of his face at that time was like the brilliance of the rising sun or like that of the pure fountain of life.[230]

> As it was, Baba's face was fair and of a yellowish complexion and when the light of the lamp blended with it, his face would appear yellowish gold with a tinge of copper-red, resembling the glow of the rising sun.[231]

> Shirdi, Sunday 7 January 1912
>
> In the morning I got up early and attended the Kakad Arti. *Saying Maharaj looked exceedingly pleased and gave Yogic glances. I passed the whole day in a sort of ecstasy.* After morning, I, Bapusaheb Jog and Upasani commenced Ranganath's Yogavasistha. *Then we saw Sayin Maharaj go out* and in the interval sat talking with the young Mohammadans that came to the Masjid. One of them recited some verses. The midday Arti was late. ***Sayin Baba commenced a very good tale. He said he had a very good well. The water in it was sky blue, and its supply was inexhaustible. Four motas*** [= bailing buckets] ***could not empty it, and the fruit grown with the water was inordinately pure and tasteful. He did not continue the story beyond this point.***
> In the afternoon, Dixit read two chapters of Ramayan. Upasani, myself, Ram Maruti and Dixit were present. Then we went to Sayin Baba and *attended his stroll. As it was getting dark, he got or rather showed as if he got angry with the woodcutter women.*

228 For a brief sketch of Meher Baba, see Rigopoulos, *Life and Teachings*, 208-10. For a detailed study on his life and teachings, see Shepherd, *Meher Baba*.

229 Munsiff, *Sai Baba*, 38-9. See also *ibid.*, 45.

230 Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 618 (chap. 37, vv. 154-5).

231 Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 854 (chap. 51, v. 239). The radiance (*tejas*) of a saint's eyes and face is regarded as a characteristic of deities and 'great beings' (*mahāpuruṣa*), such as the Buddha.

> At night there was Bhishma's Bhajan and Dixit's Ramayan. PS: I received today a letter which bears all the indications of it being written by a detective. It speaks about the release of Tilak and has what appears to be a bogus enclosure. A Parsi gentleman came here today with his ladies and intends going away tomorrow.

The diarist once again portrays Sai Baba as "exceedingly pleased" and eager to bestow his grace upon his devotees. On this occasion, he is said to have cast "Yogic glances", one of which he directed toward Khaparde. Such was the potency of this gaze that Khaparde reportedly spent the entire day "in a sort of ecstasy", immersed in a state of bliss (*ānanda*).

It is plausible that the diarist himself led the reading and exegesis of the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*. As previously noted, his command of Hindu scriptures was extensive, and in Shirdi he appears to have been regarded as the most learned among the devotees.

Particularly noteworthy is the observation that, in the morning, when Sai Baba went out – either toward the Lendi garden or on his customary begging rounds – Khaparde and others "sat talking with the young Mohammadans that came to the Masjid". Many Muslims, both laypersons and *faqīr*s, were drawn to Sai Baba, whom they recognized as a Sufi saint.

The fact that Khaparde and other Hindus engaged in conversation with them attests to the fraternal atmosphere prevailing in Shirdi and underscores the diarist's intellectual openness. One of these Muslims "recited some verses" aloud – possibly from the Koran – an evocative detail that captures the integrative spirituality fostered by Sai Baba.

This interreligious ethos is further corroborated by Khaparde's postscript reference to the arrival of a Parsi gentleman with his ladies.

The *faqīr*'s brief yet "very good" tale provides another instance of his characteristically allusive mode of teaching. The symbolism of the well is both widespread and richly layered across religious traditions. One is reminded of Kṛṣṇa's metaphor of the water reservoir in *Bhagavadgītā* 2.46, as well as the episode of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well (*John* 4:1-42). Bharadwaja interprets the story as follows: "The Well is the spiritual heart; the pure water is the *chidakash*, the spiritual expanse within, the inexhaustible source of bliss. Four buckets are the four purusarthas or objects of man's endeavour, viz., righteousness, wealth, fulfillment of needs and liberation".[232] Accordingly, the fruit (*phala*) may be understood as symbolizing the ultimate experience of *blissful* union with the divine.

At the same time, the polyvalence of the imagery invites a plurality of readings. As Vinny Chitluri suggests, water may also be taken to represent the *ātman*: "Water is odourless, shapeless, colourless; so too is the soul. It is *nirliṅgī* [genderless], *nirlapta* [unaffected], *nirvikāra* [unchanging]".[233] Rather than fixing a single symbolic correspondence, the narrative appears to gesture toward an inner reality that exceeds any one interpretive framework. In this sense, Sai Baba's use of imagery may be seen as deliberately evocative, opening a space for reflection rather than prescribing a determinate doctrinal meaning.

232 Bharadwaja, *Sai Baba the Master*, 59. For another tale in which Sai Baba speaks of pure water, see Chitluri, *Baba's Rinanubandh*, 32-4.

233 Chitluri, *Baba's Rinanubandh*, 41.



Figure 37 Sai Baba going to the Lendi gardens amid his devotees, circa 1917. Photograph restored with the aid of artificial intelligence

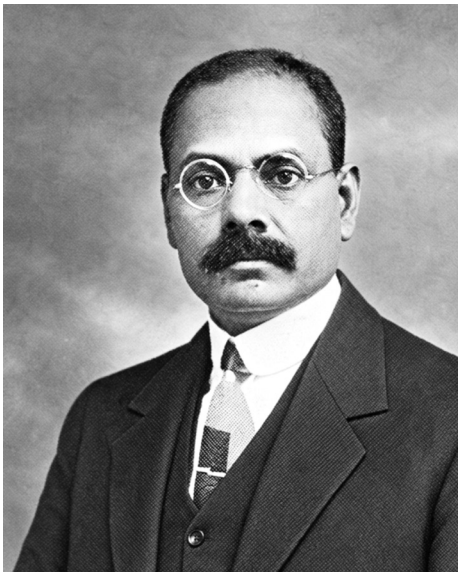

Figure 38
Prof. Ganpatrao G. Narke

From a Sufi perspective, "bringing up water from a well" corresponds to the literal meaning of the Arabic term *istinbāṭ*, which denotes the effort to extract the deepest significance from a given text. This process requires sustained remembrance (*dhikr*)[234] – practised vocally, mentally, or, at its highest level, within the heart – so that the practitioner becomes wholly immersed in its depths. The 'text' in question is often one of the Beautiful Names of Allāh, and it is plausible that Sai Baba alludes here to his favored invocation, *Allāh Mālik*. Within such a framework, the well may be read as symbolizing the adept's inner domain – the cavern of the heart – within which lies the "inexhaustible", "sky-blue" water of the divine Name. That even four *moṭā*s (buckets) cannot exhaust the well may suggest that the human faculties of mind and language are inherently incapable of fully apprehending or delimiting the infinite richness of the divine Name.

The number four, however, admits of multiple symbolic valences. While it may evoke associations such as the four *Veda*s,[235] the four *varṇa*s, the four *āśrama*s, or the four *puruṣārtha*s, as Bharadwaja proposes, one might also cautiously relate it to the inner faculties of *manas*, *buddhi*, *citta*, and

234 On the practice of *dhikr*, see Speziale, "Istruzioni sullo *dhikr*", 137-55; Trimingham, *Sufi Orders in Islam*, 194-217.

235 At times, numbers may allude to specific texts. For example, the number eleven could be taken to refer to the *Eknāthī Bhāgavata*, that is, Eknāth's commentary on the eleventh *skandha* of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, while the number fifty-three may evoke the fifty-three chapters of the *Gurucaritra*; see Chitluri, *Baba's Vaani*, 123.

ahaṃkāra.[236] At the same time, it is important to note that Sai Baba's mode of instruction often resists systematic doctrinal closure, and the narrative may be intended less as a fixed symbolic schema than as an evocative pointer toward an inexhaustible inner reality.

The fruit produced by means of this water – that is, through the constant remembrance of the divine Name – and described as "inordinately pure and tasteful", may be understood as signifying the ecstatic realization of divine omnipresence. In such a state, the adept becomes wholly immersed in divine bliss; the heart recalls the Name effortlessly and spontaneously at all times. Ultimately, only the Divine remains, as all dualistic distinctions between subject and object dissolve. From this perspective, Sai Baba's tale may be read as suggesting that the transient bliss conferred through his powerful gaze could be rendered enduring through the continual remembrance of God's Name. At the same time, the open-endedness of the narrative cautions against reducing it to a single interpretive key; its function may lie as much in its capacity to provoke reflection as in any determinate symbolic content. That "he did not continue the story beyond this point" is therefore unsurprising, for the narrative is complete in itself. As Rao Bahadur Hari Vinayak Sathe reportedly remarked to Narasimhaswami: "Baba's utterances were short. He abruptly stopped many of his stories".[237]

Khaparde further records that, in the late afternoon, when "it was getting dark", the *faqīr* "got or rather showed as if he got angry with the woodcutter women". The precise reason for Sai Baba's reaction remains unclear. Nevertheless, Khaparde's phrasing is significant, as it suggests an emerging awareness that the saint often merely appeared to display anger, while its true object lay elsewhere.

In his postscript, Khaparde mentions receiving a letter that he suspected had been written by a detective. The letter addressed a matter of great personal importance to him – namely, Tilak's release from prison – and contained what appeared to be "a bogus enclosure". This incident illustrates how the British authorities not only monitored Khaparde's movements but also sought to influence him, in this instance by gauging his response to the information conveyed in the letter.

> Shirdi, Monday 8 January 1912
>
> I got up early in the morning and feeling it too early went again to sleep and then overslept my usual moment of leaving bed. So things got set forward and in that way affected the routine of the whole day.
> After prayer, I sat reading Yogavasistha of Ranganath with Bapusaheb Jog, Upasani, Ram Maruti and Madhavrao Deshpande. *We saw Sayin Maharaj go out and again saw him after he returned*.

236 Narasimhaswami interprets the number four along similar lines, even with regard to Sai Baba's request for *dakṣiṇā*. He writes: "Baba to B.V. Dev: 'Bhau, give me *dakshina*'. B.V. Dev gave one guinea. Baba: 'Give me more'. Baba, after getting four, said: 'Though four were given by you, Baba has got only one'. Dev: 'Baba, I have given four'. Baba: 'Yes, but I have only one. You will know'. The obvious interpretation is, though the devotee surrenders his fourfold Antahkarana (of Manas, Buddhi, Ahankara, Chitta) Baba receives only the Jiva, and all multiplicity, when it reached God-Baba, becomes *one*. So the mind must surrender multiplicity unto the God-Guru to attain unity" (Narasimhaswami, *Charters and Sayings*, 94-5).

237 Narasimhaswami, *Devotees' Experiences*, 126.

> During the midday service after the Arti, *Sayin Maharaj exhibited sudden and great anger and abused violently. It appears as if plague is likely to reappear here and Sayin Maharaj is endeavoring to prevent its reappearance.*
> After meals we sat talking. I read a little of Ramayan and then arrived Mr. Sane, Mamlatdar of Kopargaon, with Mr. Joshi who is a Deputy Collector of Dhulia.
> Later on *we went to Sayin Maharaj* after reading a chapter of Ramayan. *We waited there long enough to see him at and after his usual stroll* and then attended the Shej Arti.
> At night there was the usual Bhajan and Ramayan.

Probably drawing on information provided by local villagers, Khaparde interprets the saint's sudden outbursts of wrath and violent language as being directed against the plague – the deadly disease that instilled widespread fear at the time. It was commonly believed that, through his spiritual powers, the *faqīr* could either annihilate the plague or drive it away from Shirdi. More broadly, Sai Baba's eruptions of anger – described in Sufi terminology as manifestations of *jalāl* ('fiery majesty' or 'terrible splendor') – were often understood as being directed against malign forces, including evil spirits, misfortunes afflicting his devotees, and the sinful thoughts or conduct of those who approached him.[238]

A striking illustration of this interpretive framework is found in an account concerning the revival of a girl named Malanbai, the daughter of Damodar Ranganath Joshi Degaonkar, who had been brought to Shirdi in accordance with her final wish. The narrative proceeds as follows:

> [O]ne morning she died. Her grandmother and other relatives started crying, and they consoled each other. The male members went to make funeral arrangements. Sathe Sahib tried his best to console them. The devotees had gathered in the Dwaraka Mai for *Kakad arati*, but Baba just would not get up. When he did get up he was in a terrible rage. He struck the floor with his *satka* many times. Simultaneously he let out a volley of fowl language and abuses. Then Baba got up and went towards Dixit *wada* in rage. He was abusing and shaking his *satka* at the room where Malanbai stayed. At that very moment Malanbai moved her limbs and began yawning. She looked around as if confirming where she was. Then she got up and sat down. Her relatives were shocked and confused. Gently they questioned her, as to what had happened. Then she narrated this *leela*: "I was being carried away by a black ugly-looking man. He was very rough, and he pulled and dragged me. I did not go with him easily, I called my Baba to save me from this demonic person. Of course my Baba came to me and gave that black man a good thrashing. The black man (Yama) was no match for my Baba, so he let go of me. Then my Baba took me to his *Chavdi* where I lay comfortably".[239]

238 Kevin Shepherd mentions the following episode: "While Kashiram was fighting the bandits, Sai Baba expressed abusive anger in Shirdi. The reason was not obvious, but devotees like Shama (Madhavrao Deshpande) felt that someone was in grave danger. In this perspective, the saint's anger was intended to avert the trouble befalling his devotee" (Shepherd, *Faqir of Shirdi*, 65). See also *ibid*., 169; Pradhan, *Shri Sai Baba of Shirdi*, 29-30. For more instances, see Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 172-5 (chap. 11, vv. 78-113), 374-6 (chap. 23, vv. 37-66), 683-7 (chap. 41, vv. 111-53), 689 fn. 8, 807 (chap. 49, vv. 131-4); Chitluri, *Baba's Divine Symphony*, 14, 28, 40, 69; Chitluri, *Baba's Rinanubandh*, 15, 34, 63.

239 Chitluri, *Baba's Vaani*, 61.

Further corroboration of the perception of Sai Baba's anger may be found in Hari Sitaram Dixit's memoir, edited by Rao Bahadur Moreshwar W. Pradhan, where it is noted that "at times he [= Sai Baba] appeared to be in great anger – a line of conduct which to the worldly folks appeared to be that of a madman".[240] On certain occasions, he would strike devotees with his *satka*, an emblem of his ascetic authority, and such acts were interpreted by followers as blessings.[241] He is also reported to have thrown stones at visitors, an action that devotees likewise construed in positive terms: if the stone struck its intended target, it was regarded as a sign of special grace capable of conferring spiritual insight. As one account relates:

> [W]hen Gadge [Baba] refused to leave, the *faqir* threw a brick at him. This missile hit the visitor on the forehead, leaving a mark. Gadge is said to have achieved an enlightenment at that instant. Sai remarked "Allah will bless you".[242]

> Shirdi, Tuesday 9 January 1912
>
> I got up early in the morning, attended the Kakad Arti and after finishing the prayer had my bath.
> Then with Bapusaheb Jog, Upasani and Ram Maruti read the Yogavasistha.
> *We saw Sayin Maharaj go out and then again after he returned to Masjid*. There was a gentleman named Pimple from Amalved with a companion.
> After the midday Arti we had our meals and I sat reading the letters received by today's mail. There are also three newspapers. So there was a good deal to read.
> Dixit read the Ramayan about 5 PM and later on *we went to the Masjid and saluted him* [= Sai Baba] *when he came out for his stroll*.
> At night there was the usual Bhajan of Bhishma and Dixit's Ramayan.

The day appears to have been largely uneventful. Khaparde adhered to his customary routine; however, there is no record of any conversations with Sai Baba at the mosque, nor of any notable actions or utterances by the latter directed either to him or to other devotees.

He merely notes that he "saw" Sai Baba in the morning and "saluted" him in the afternoon upon visiting the mosque – that is, he had *darśan* of the *faqīr* and subsequently offered his *praṇām*s. It is possible that this was one of those occasions on which Sai Baba remained silent and preferred minimal interaction, withdrawing from extended engagement with visitors.

240 Pradhan, *Shri Sai Baba of Shirdi*, 33.

241 See Shepherd, *Faqir of Shirdi*, 150. See also Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 861-2 (chap. 52, vv. 62-6).

242 Shepherd, *Biographical Investigation*, 51. On Sai Baba's hurling of stones at his devotee Madhavrao Deshpande, see Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 101 (chap. 6, v. 141). See also *ibid.*, 150 (chap. 10, v. 27). On one occasion, the saint hurled a pair of cymbals that struck a devotee's forehead, leaving a scar intended to ensure that he would not lose his way spiritually; see Chitluri, *Baba's Divine Symphony*, 72-3. It is reported that even Upasani Maharaj 'greeted' Meher Baba by hurling a stone at him with great force, striking him on the forehead. Meher Baba interpreted this as a stroke of *jñāna*, that is, divine knowledge; see Rigopoulos, *Life and Teachings*, 208.

Following the midday meal, Khaparde devoted his time to reading his correspondence, along with "three newspapers". Evidently, he was intent on keeping abreast of developments in his hometown of Amraoti as well as in the broader sphere of Indian politics. Although he had, in a sense, submitted to Sai Baba's will by prolonging his stay in Shirdi and concentrating on spiritual pursuits, he nonetheless endeavoured to remain informed about the activities of the Indian National Congress at both the provincial and national levels. This engagement does not appear to have conflicted with Sai Baba's teachings. For Sai Baba, life was an integrated whole, and religion and politics were not to be regarded as mutually exclusive or incompatible domains. The *faqīr* consistently demonstrated an interest in the worldly affairs of his devotees, offering guidance on practical matters – including financial concerns – and assisting in the resolution of their difficulties.[243]

At the same time, he exhorted them to focus on what was essential, namely their spiritual advancement, particularly during their stay in Shirdi.

> Shirdi, Wednesday 10 January 1912
>
> I got up very early in the morning and finished my prayer and all before day break.
> Then I, Upasani, Bhishma and Bapusaheb Jog read Ranganath's Yogavasistha and later on *I went to see Sayin Maharaj both when he went out and after he returned to the Masjid. A Marwadi*[244] *came there and told his dream. He said he received a lot of silver and finally got bars of gold and woke up while he was in the act of counting them. Sayin Saheb said that the dream indicated the death of some great man.*
> I felt very sleepy while I was at the Masjid. I tried my utmost to keep awake but, notwithstanding all my efforts, my eyes kept closing every few minutes.
> I returned to my lodging after the midday Arti and after food lay down for some time.
> Then Mr. Dixit read Ramayan and we sat listening.
> In the evening we went to the Masjid *to see Sayin Saheb stroll out as usual* and later on we attended the Shej Arti. Bhate and Balakram were both absent. So the duty of holding the peacock fan (morchal) fell to me and I enjoyed holding it very much.
> At night there was the usual Bhajan of Bhishma and Ramayan of Dixit.

243 The people who came to Shirdi to meet Sai Baba were, for the most part, householders (*gṛhastha*s). Very few were renouncers *(saṃnyāsin*s) or *faqīr*s. On the life of the householder in Hindu society, see Madan, *Non-Renunciation*.

244 A moneylender or businessman, originally from the Marwar region of western Rajasthan.

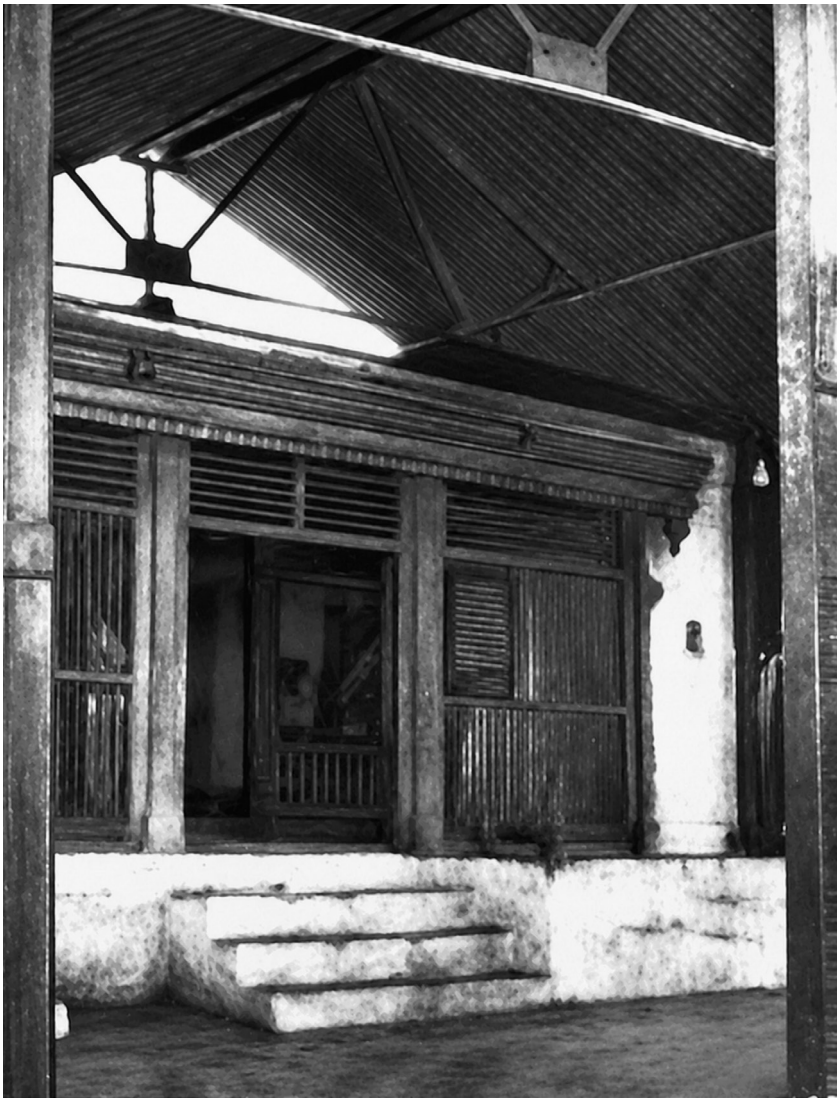

Figure 39 The Shirdi mosque in the 1920s

What is noteworthy is that a visitor came to the *masjid* and recounted his dream to Sai Baba, seeking his interpretation. The *faqīr* appears to have shared the widespread belief in premonitory dreams and accordingly offered his own interpretation to the Mārvāḍī. How he came to the conclusion that receiving a large amount of silver and bars of gold indicated "the death of some great man" is difficult to determine. We may hypothesize that Sai Baba interpreted the silver and gold as representing an inheritance, i.e., that the dream foreshadowed that the Mārvāḍī would inherit these riches from a wealthy person, possibly a relative of his. In any case, what is interesting is that the saint would be asked to offer his own interpretation of a dream and that he would readily agree to listen to it and provide his explanation.

Khaparde's remark that he "felt very sleepy" while he was at the *masjid* is not surprising given that he had "got up very early", well before daybreak. Nonetheless, he managed to make up for this lack of sleep by lying down for some time after lunch. Particularly noteworthy is the detail that, at the evening procession toward the *cāvaḍī* for the celebration of the *śej ārtī*, he was given the "duty of holding the peacock fan", i.e., of fanning "Sayin Maharaj" with this symbol of royalty: it was an unexpected honor for the diarist – the people who usually performed this service being absent – and he points out that he "enjoyed holding it very much". This comment may sound somewhat naïve or even childish coming from a sophisticated person like Khaparde. In fact, it is important to note the depth of this man's *bhakti*, often hidden in the restraint of his writing and in his extraordinary self-control. Khaparde's devotion and admiration for Sai Baba were such that the chance of holding the peacock fan during the procession was truly a blessing for him. This small incident shows how much he loved Sai Baba and also demonstrates his humility.

> Shirdi, Thursday 11 January 1912
>
> I got up very early, prayed and attended the Kakad Arti.
> At the usual time, I, Upasani and Bapusaheb Jog read Yogavasistha of Ranganath.
> *We saw Sayin Maharaj go out and again after he returned. He was in very good mood and everything passed off in good style.*
> After the midday meal, I lay down for a while and then Dixit read Ramayan. He also read a […] stotra by Eknath.[245]
> Towards evening we went as usual *to see Sayin Maharaj come out for his stroll. He did so*. Radhakrishna Bai had set up the phonograph. *On hearing its noise Sayin Maharaj got very angry and used hard words and we returned thinking.*
> At night there was the usual Bhajan of Bhishma and Dixit's Puran.
> There was Rahata Bazar today and Bandu went to it but could purchase nothing beyond vegetables.

In the evening, the wealthy devotee Radhakrishna Bai installed a "phonograph", i.e., a gramophone, apparently in the courtyard of the mosque. She wished to honor the saint with this new, Western invention and played some music, hoping that he would be pleasantly surprised by it.

245 The word preceding *stotra* is unclear in the original manuscript, but appears to read *guru*, thus referring to a hymn in praise of the spiritual master composed by Eknāth.

But Sai Baba, who greatly valued the quiet atmosphere of the mosque, "on hearing its noise got very angry and used hard words". It would seem that the saint disapproved of the artificiality of music coming from a machine: he did not appreciate such innovations, since what he wished to promote among his devotees was 'heartificiality', i.e., the primacy of the heart. Perhaps he was offended as well by what appeared to him as a waste of money, a needless display that contradicted his simple '*faqīri*' life. Sai Baba was not against music as such – indeed, he loved music – and it is noteworthy that the very next day he did permit music and dance. What disturbed him was this ostentatious display, and also the fact that this 'artificial music' had been played at a loud volume and without his prior consent, thereby disturbing the quiet atmosphere of the place. The observation that Khaparde and the other devotees "returned thinking" to their lodgings suggests that Sai Baba's angry reaction – which they did not anticipate, as during the morning the saint was "in very good mood" – led them to reflect on the reasons for his behavior. The *faqīr* may thus have intended to teach a lesson to Radhakrishna Bai and to all his *bhakta*s.

> Shirdi, Friday 12 January 1912
>
> I got up early in the morning, said my prayers, and began the usual routine of the day when Narayan Rao's son Gondya and his brother Bhausaheb came. They arrived at Amravati from Hoshangabad sometime ago, and not finding me and my wife there came here to see us. We were naturally very glad to see each other and sat talking.
> We began our Yogavasistha somewhat late as Bapusaheb Jog was away.
> *We saw Sayin Maharaj go out and again after he returned to the Masjid. He was very gracious and repeatedly gave me smoke out of his pipe. It solved many of my doubts and I felt delighted.*
> After the midday Arti we had our meals and I had a few minutes' rest.
> *Dixit was delayed longer than usual at the Masjid.* So he began Ramayan later than usual and we could not finish a chapter as it was both long and difficult.
> *Then we saw Sayin Maharaj at the Masjid. He had music. There were two dancing girls who sang and danced.*
> Later on there was the Shej Arti.
> *Sayin Maharaj was very kind to Balvant, sent for him, and let him spend the whole of the afternoon with him.*

In the morning, Khaparde and his wife Lakshmibai received a visit from two friends of theirs: they both were "very glad" to see Gondya and Bhausaheb, the sons of one Narayan Rao.

Khaparde writes that at the mosque Sai Baba "was very gracious and repeatedly gave me smoke out of his pipe". The detail that the saint frequently shared his clay pipe (*cilīm*) with the diarist was a special favor on the *faqīr*'s part, which strengthened the bond of love between him and his *bhakta*. Already on 11 December 1911, Khaparde wrote that Sai Baba gave him the clay pipe "very often", and even on 23 December 1911 he stated that the *faqīr* gave him smoke out of his *cilīm*, adding that "it solved many of my doubts and I felt delighted". Devotees thought that if the saint shared his *cilīm* with a person, something auspicious would happen to him or her,

i.e., he or she would be granted both worldly and spiritual benefits.[246] At other times, it was the saint who consented to have a smoke from someone else's pipe, which was also understood to be a token of his grace. It will be remembered how in his entries dated 9 and 13 December 1911, Khaparde wrote that Sai Baba had a smoke out of his *hukka*.

The fact that in the early afternoon Dixit was "delayed longer than usual at the Masjid", so that he began his reading of the *Rāmāyaṇa* "later than usual", is another interesting detail. Being one of Sai Baba's closest *bhakta*s, he was one of the few who had prolonged conversations with him. Even in his entry of 11 December 1910, Khaparde noted how the *faqīr* was seen "talking all through to Haribhau Dixit".

In the afternoon, the *faqīr* "had music" at the mosque, and "there were two dancing girls who sang and danced". This appears to have been his response to the previous day's incident, i.e., the phonograph's "noise". The saint was always fond of music, and in the *Shri Sai Satcharita* (chap. 4, v. 49) we read: "He moved and conversed with the common folks and watched with them the dancing and gesticulating of the *Muralis*:[247] he nodded appreciatively as he listened to the songs and *ghazals*.[248] And yet his *Samadhi*[249] was unperturbed".[250] The very fact that these two artists came to Shirdi to give a performance is indicative of Sai Baba's growing fame.

The *faqīr* is said to have been "very kind" to Khaparde's son Balvant: he "sent for him" and allowed him to "spend the whole of the afternoon with him". Balvant was privileged to receive so much attention from Sai Baba and, as we shall shortly see, such intimacy may be understood as reinforcing his faith in anticipation of difficult times to come.

Shirdi, Saturday 13 January 1912

I got up early in the morning and attended the Kakad Arti.
Sayin Maharaj did not say a word today and did not even throw the glances which he usually does.
The Tahasildar[251] of Khandwa has come here. We saw him when we were reading Ranganath's Yogavasistha. The book does not appear to sustain the impression it makes at first.
We saw Sayin Maharaj go out and again after he returned.
Yesterday's singing women were there. They sang a bit, *got sweetmeats for their reward* and then went away.
The midday Arti passed very pleasantly. Megha is not yet quite well.
Bapaji, the brother of Madhavrao Deshpande, was invited to breakfast with his wife.
The Tahasildar of Khandwa appears to be a cultured man, has read Yogavasistha. He says he has been brought to grief by designing persons for his devotional tendencies.
After a little afternoon rest, Dixit read Bhavarth Ramayan.

246 See Ramalingaswami, *Ambrosia in Shirdi*, 118-19; Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 852 (chap. 51, vv. 217-21).

247 Women dedicated to the service of the deity Khaṇḍobā.

248 Persian lyrical poems.

249 The highest state of awareness in yogic practice.

250 Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 58.

251 A district official in charge of revenues and taxation.

> The chapter (11th of Balkand) is a summary of Yogavasistha and is very interesting.
> *We saw Sayin Maharaj again as he strolled out. His mood was changed and one would think that he was angry which he really was not.*
> At night there was Bhajan and Ramayan as usual.

Today the *faqīr* was in a withdrawn, taciturn mood. His silence may be understood as a lesson in itself: devotees were called to follow his example and turn inward, avoiding idle talk. It is noteworthy that the diarist writes that the saint did not throw the glances which he usually does, implying that Sai Baba 'pierced' his devotees with his penetrating sight on a regular basis, i.e., that this was a common occurrence.

The fact that in the morning the two dancing girls were again allowed to sing at the *masjid* and that they received sweetmeats as reward, that is, as *prasād*, confirms that Sai Baba appreciated their art.

The diarist's observation that in the afternoon the saint's mood "had changed", i.e., that while in the morning he seemed to be in a good mood – despite the fact that he kept silent – he now appeared to be in a bad one, and yet that it would have been wrong to "think that he was angry which he really was not", highlights the apparent volatility of Sai Baba's temper. His disposition could vary suddenly, for no apparent reason, and these mood changes could be frequent during the twenty-four hours. In this way, he appears to have kept all visitors on their toes: they all had to be alert, ready for anything that might happen.

> Shirdi, Sunday 14 January 1912
>
> I got up early in the morning, finished my prayer and sat to read Ranganath's Yogavasistha with Bapusaheb Jog, Upasani and Ram Maruti. We continued it, *after seeing Sayin Baba go out. I went to the Masjid after he returned and found that he was arranging for a bath.* So I returned and wrote two letters *and went again. He was very kind to me and gave Til Gul*[252] *brought for him by Bapusaheb Jog. He gave it to Balvant also.*
> The midday Arti was a little late as Megha is not well, and it being Til Sankranti[253] the Paros[254] were late.
> By the time we returned and had our midday meal it was 4 PM.
> Then Dixit read Ramayan but we did not make much progress.
> In the afternoon when I went [to the Masjid] *Sayin Baba did not admit anybody.* So I took a turn by Bapusaheb Jog's quarters and *went in time for evening namaskar.*
> The Tahasildar of Khandwa is still here and gradually falling into the routine of the place. One Mr. Gupte has come with his brother and family. He says he is distantly related to my friend Baba Gupte of Thana. I sat talking with him.
> In the evening there was Shej Arti, Bhishma's Bhajan and Dixit's Ramayan. We all celebrated the Sankranti though on a small scale.

252 A sweet which is a mixture of sesame seeds (*til*) and jaggery (*gul*). In Maharashtra, people exchange *tilgul* during the festival of Makara Saṅkrānti which marks the auspicious day on which the sun enters the Capricorn (Makara) sign and begins its northward journey (*uttarāyaṇa*). Being based on the solar calendar, it falls every year on 14 January.

253 The same as Makara Saṅkrānti. The *til* or sesame seeds symbolize fertility and prosperity.

254 Platefuls that devotees brought to the saint hoping he would bless the food and partake of it.

In the morning, when Khaparde went to the mosque to meet Sai Baba after the latter's walk to the Lendi gardens, he found that the *faqīr* was "arranging for a bath" and therefore returned to his lodgings. This detail suggests the informal atmosphere that prevailed at the mosque and indicates that the saint enjoyed very little privacy. When, in October 1985, I interviewed Madhavrao Deshpande's son, Uddhavrao, he stated that "Baba used to take a full, complete bath every day, either at the *masjid* or at the Leṇḍī *baug*".[255] Traditionally, the auspicious festival of Makara Saṅkrānti begins with ritual bathing in water containing sesame seeds (*til*). When Khaparde later returned to the mosque, the saint was "very kind" to both him and his son Balvant, giving them *tilgul*, that is, the sweet that had been offered to him by Bapusaheb Jog and that is customarily exchanged among Hindus on this occasion. This gesture constitutes further evidence of the affection he showed toward Khaparde and his family, who regarded the *faqīr*'s gift as sacred *prasād*.

The fact that in the afternoon Sai Baba "did not admit anybody" into the *masjid* suggests that he occasionally set aside time for himself. Khaparde and the other devotees appear to have respected this decision. Later, the diarist returned to the mosque just in time to see the *faqīr* setting out for his evening stroll and to offer his *namaskār*. The act of prostration before the master should not be understood merely as a formality; rather, it carries profound significance, expressing the devotee's complete surrender.

> Shirdi, Monday 15 January 1912
>
> I got up early in the morning, prayed and attended the Kakad Arti which was a little later than usual as Megha having been unwell could not get up in time to blow the conch shell. *Sayin Maharaj did not say a word as he got up and left the Chavadi*.
> The Tilgul of which I ate a little yesterday appears to have affected me injuriously. Upasani Shastri and Bapusaheb Jog did not come soon. So I sat writing letters.
> *When Sayin Maharaj went out he asked me how I spent the morning, which was a mild rebuke for not having read and contemplated. I went to see him again when he returned and he was very kind.* ***He commenced a long story and kept on as if speaking to me, but I felt sleepy all the time and did not understand anything of the story. I was told afterwards that the story was a very thinly veiled recital of the events that actually happened in the life of Gupte****. So he* [= Gupte] *said.*
> The midday Arti was late and it was 3 PM by the time we returned and had our meals. I lay down a bit and then attended Dixit's Puran.
> Later on we went to the Masjid but *were told to salute from a distance*, which we accordingly did.
> *Sayin Baba came for his stroll and we saluted as usual.*
> Dixit had an illumination of the Masjid yesterday and repeated it today also.
> At night there was the usual Bhajan of Bhishma and Puran of Dixit.

255 Rigopoulos, *Oral Testimonies on Sai Baba*, 32.

Khaparde was unwell and attributed his condition to the *tilgul* he had consumed the previous day, which, he notes, affected him "injuriously"; he may have suffered from a stomach ailment. Once again, the *faqīr* is said to have remained silent, leaving the *cāvaḍī* early in the morning without uttering a word.

The question that Sai Baba posed to Khaparde regarding "how he spent the morning" is noteworthy. Although the diarist could point to mitigating circumstances – his indisposition and the fact that "Upasani Shastri and Bapusaheb Jog did not come soon" for their customary reading of the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, leading him instead to spend time "writing letters" – the *faqīr* nevertheless appears to have gently reproached him for neglecting his *sādhanā*, that is, his study of sacred texts,[256] prayer, and meditation, practices to which Khaparde was otherwise inclined. Those who came to Shirdi were generally expected not to devote themselves to worldly concerns but rather to engage fully in spiritual practices and to adhere to the established routine of the place, with its scheduled *darśan*s, meetings with the *faqīr*, *bhajan*s, and related observances.

Later in the morning, Khaparde went to the *masjid* to meet Sai Baba. He records that the latter was "very kind" to him. However, he "felt sleepy" and was unable to follow a "long story" narrated by Sai Baba, who "kept on as if speaking to him", an important detail. Here the diarist's human frailty becomes evident, his drowsiness perhaps being connected to his ill health. Sai Baba's narratives were often difficult to comprehend and required sustained attention if one wished to grasp their meaning; in this respect, the episode may be read as implicitly highlighting Khaparde's lapse into *tamas* ('darkness', 'inertia') in Sāṃkhya-Yoga terminology, a condition regarded as a significant obstacle to spiritual progress.

At the same time, the episode reflects the belief, held by devotees, that one could truly understand Sai Baba's words only with his sanction – that is, only if he allowed their meaning to reach the listener's mind and heart. Without such grace, it was considered impossible to derive genuine insight from them. Khaparde's inability to concentrate on the *faqīr*'s narrative may thus also be interpreted as a consequence of his having spent the morning in relatively unproductive pursuits.

Khaparde was later informed that the tale was "a very thinly veiled recital of the events that actually happened" to a certain Mr. Gupte, who was present at the mosque. One of Sai Baba's principal aims – given the multivalent nature of his utterances – appears to have been to demonstrate his *antarajñāna* (inner or intuitive knowledge) of Mr. Gupte's life, even as he deliberately refrained from looking at him and addressed the diarist throughout.

In the afternoon, when Khaparde and the other devotees arrived at the mosque for their customary meeting with the saint, the latter instructed

256 Sai Baba recommended that his devotees engage daily in *pothīpārāyaṇa*, that is, the reading of sacred texts such as the *Jñāneśvarī*, the *Eknāthī Bhāgavata*, the *Gurucaritra*, the *Bhagavadgītā*, and the *Viṣṇusahasranāma*. For an overview, see Narasimhaswami, *Charters and Sayings*, 69-71; Satpathy, *An Inspiring Life*, 192-3; Rigopoulos, *Life and Teachings*, 261-70. In the *Shri Sai Satcharita*, it is stated: "When Baba knew that his own life was nearing its end, he followed the same practice and got '*Ram Vijay*' [= a text on Lord Rāma that is traditionally recited during Vijayā Daśamī (Dasserā)] read out to him, by which, Shankar [= Śiva], the Conqueror of Death, is pleased"; Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 504 (chap. 31, v. 50). See also *ibid*., 708 (chap. 43, vv. 35-9), 723 (chap. 44, vv. 13-14).

them authoritatively "to salute from a distance". He thus did not admit anyone into the *masjid*, indicating a clear desire to remain undisturbed.

Finally, it is noteworthy that "Dixit had an illumination of the Masjid yesterday and repeated it today also". It is known that he undertook considerable efforts to improve the condition of the mosque and that, in the course of 1912, he arranged for the installation of tile flooring, replacing what had previously been a muddy and damp surface. He brought masons from Bombay, and the work was carried out at night while Sai Baba slept at the *cāvaḍī*, thereby minimizing the *faqīr*'s objections to such material enhancements.[257]

> Shirdi, Tuesday 16 January 1912
>
> In the morning I got up as usual, prayed and commenced the daily routine with Paramamrit. It is a very celebrated Marathi work on Vedanta. Upasani reads; I, Bapusaheb Jog, Bhishma and Ram Maruti listen. It is exceedingly nice and I gave explanations whenever necessary.
> *I was able to see Sayin Maharaj go out but was late in going to see him after he returned to Masjid. He not only showed no displeasure but treated me with positive kindness and I sat serving.*
> The midday Arti was late as Megha is ill and was not ordered to come soon. He did so at last, and by the time we returned and had our meals it was nearly 4 PM.
> Dixit read a little of Ramayan and then *we went to see Sayin Saheb at the Masjid. He did not permit us to sit long and came out himself and finished his usual stroll in a hurry and ordered us to return to the Wada.* We could not understand it, but on returning to the Wada learnt that Hari, a servant of Dixit who felt indisposed the other day, died. We sent for Upasani who understands medicine but he could not be found. That the man was dead, there could be no doubt about.
> We did the usual Arti in the Wada and attended the Shej Arti. *Sayin Maharaj was particularly gracious at the latter and sent out wonderful currents of joy and instruction. He favored Ram Maruti similarly.*
> We returned very much pleased and then a little before midnight could perform the obsequies of the servant Hari. It was difficult to procure fuel. Bapaji managed it somehow and then the body was cremated. The thing would not have been so difficult had Madhavrao Deshpande been here, but he went to Nagar[258] in the afternoon to fetch his wife and children. The funeral took a long time. We could neither have the usual Bhajan of Bhishma nor the Puran of Dixit.

Khaparde began the day in a highly appropriate manner, engaging in prayer and in *pothīpārāyaṇa*, that is, the collective reading of a classical Marāṭhī text such as the *Paramāmṛt* (lit. 'supreme nectar') of Mukundarāja (13th century CE), an exposition of the fundamental tenets of Vedānta philosophy

257 See Chitluri, *Baba's Vaani*, 99. See also Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 81 (chap. 5, vv. 97-8), 100 (chap. 6, vv. 124-6). The initial repairs of the mosque were undertaken by Gopal Rao Gund in 1897 and by Nanasaheb Chandorkar in 1898; see Satpathy, *An Inspiring Life*, 35.

258 The city of Ahmednagar.

composed in the distinctive intellectual style of a Vedāntin.[259] The diarist's remark that he "gave explanations whenever necessary" to Upasani, Bapusaheb Jog, Bhishma, and Ram Maruti attests to his familiarity with the subtleties of Vedānta. Indeed, Upasani is said to have regarded Khaparde as his *guru* in these matters.[260] These morning sessions, which Sai Baba appears to have encouraged, differed from the evening gatherings, during which devotees sang *bhajan*s and listened to the recitation of popular texts such as the *Rāmāyaṇa* or the *Eknāthī Bhāgavata*, in that they involved the participation of a select group of devotees, namely those with knowledge of Sanskrit and Vedānta philosophy.

The reason why Sai Baba "showed no displeasure" and treated the diarist with "positive kindness", despite his late arrival at the mosque, may lie in his approval of the manner in which Khaparde had begun the day. The detail that he "sat serving" the saint indicates that he was apparently granted the privilege of massaging his legs and feet, a highly valued form of service among *bhakta*s. This further corroborates the bond of intimacy between master and disciple, reflecting both Sai Baba's benevolence and Khaparde's sincere devotion.

The saint's apparent restlessness during the afternoon meeting at the *masjid*, his prompt dismissal of the devotees, and his hurried stroll may be connected to the sudden death of Hari, a servant of Dixit, possibly due to the plague epidemic; his funeral was conducted, not without difficulty, only around midnight. Notably, just a week earlier, on 8 January, Khaparde had observed that "it appears as if plague is likely to reappear here".

The diarist further notes that in the evening, during the *śej ārtī*, Sai Baba was "particularly gracious" and "sent out wonderful currents of joy and instruction" to him and Ram Maruti. Through his very presence, the *faqīr* appears to have conveyed both bliss (*ānanda*) and instruction (*upadeśa*), thereby imparting intuitive knowledge (*jñāna*). This mode of communication may be understood as direct and immediate, occurring from heart to heart and without the mediation of words.

> Shirdi, Wednesday 17 January 1912
>
> I got up very early, saw Bapusaheb Jog go out to bathe. I finished my prayers in the meantime.
> Then we went to the Chavadi for Kakad Arti. Megha was too ill to attend. So Bapusaheb Jog did the Arti. *Sayin Baba showed his face and smiled most benignly. It is worthwhile spending years here to see it even once. I was overjoyed and stood gazing like mad.*
> After we returned, Narayan Rao's son Govind and brother Bhau went by cart to Kopargaon en route to Hoshanjabad, and I commenced my daily routine. I wrote a few lines and then read Paramamrit with Upasani and Bapusaheb Jog.
> *We saw Sayin Maharaj go out and again after he returned to Masjid. He gave me silent instructions but like a fool I did not understand them.*
> On returning to the Wada I felt disconsolate and melancholy without cause. Balvant also felt sad and said that he wished to leave Shirdi. I asked him to ask Sayin Baba and

259 For an English translation, see Balsekar, *Sage Mukundraj's Paramaamrita*.

260 See http://saiamrithadhara.com/mahabhakthas/dadasaheb_khaparde.html, 7.

then decide.
I lay down for a while after meals and then wished to listen to Dixit's Ramayan *but Sayin Baba sent for him and he had to go*. Somehow then we made no progress.
Tahasildarsaheb Prahlad Ambadas of Khandwa today *asked for and obtained permission to return*. There is Mr. Pate[l] of Jalgaon and a Lingayat[261] with him. They may go away tomorrow.
We saw Sayin Baba during his evening stroll. He was in very good mood.
At night there was the usual Bhajan of Bhishma and Dixit's Ramayan.
During the Arti in the Wada, *I understood the instructions given in the morning and then felt happy*.

During the *kākaḍ ārtī* at the *cāvaḍī*, the saint's most benign, captivating smile overjoyed Khaparde. Such a graceful smile exercised an irresistible attraction upon him, as he "stood gazing like mad" at Sai Baba's face, imbibing its beauty and bewitching charm. The *faqīr*'s smile may be understood as the concrete expression of the outpouring of his grace toward his devotees, which helps explain why Khaparde wished to absorb it in full, 'taking it all in', as it were. The fact that the diarist, who is generally so succinct and dispassionate in his entries, remarked that "it is worthwhile spending years here to see it even once", is indicative of the exceptional impact of Sai Baba's spellbinding smile: he experienced it as pure nectar, the embodied form of the Absolute *Brahman*.[262]

At the morning meeting at the mosque, Sai Baba again gave "silent instructions" to Khaparde, though he writes that – "like a fool" – he could not understand them, and this made him feel "disconsolate and melancholy without cause" when he returned to his lodgings. To be sure, he was angry with himself for not being able to comprehend them. During the evening *ārtī*, however, he suddenly realized the meaning of the instructions that Sai Baba had given him and was filled with joy, mirroring the saint's own cheerful state during his evening stroll, when Sai Baba "was in a very good mood". Unfortunately, Khaparde says nothing about the content of this *upadeśa*. He appears to have interpreted his sudden recognition of the saint's instructions at the time of *ārtī* as a gift of grace.

Within Hinduism, the deity who teaches the supreme reality of *Brahman* through eloquent silence (*mauna*) is Śiva Dakṣiṇāmūrti – the paradigm of the *guru* – who faces the southern direction (*dakṣiṇa*) in order to oppose and defeat Death (Mṛtyu), which is thought to hail from the South. As it is said in a prefatory stanza to the *Dakṣiṇāmūrtistotra*, a hymn in praise of the god ascribed to the Advaita Vedānta master Śaṅkara:

> I praise Dakṣiṇāmūrti, the handsome youth who has expounded the truth of nonduality by eloquent silence, who is surrounded by a body of disciples consisting of old sages who are absorbed in the contemplation

261 Lit. 'wearer of the *liṅga*'. The Liṅgāyat or Vīraśaiva tradition is a South Indian *śaiva bhakti* movement that rejects, or at least deemphasizes, caste distinctions. Its adherents engage in daily devotion to a small *liṅga* – the aniconic representation of Śiva – which, following initiation, is worn by men in a silver casket suspended from a cord over the left shoulder.

262 On the motif of the smile as an expression of divine grace, see Rigopoulos, Pellegrini, *Behind Kṛṣṇa's Smile*.

> of the supreme Self, who is the prince among preceptors, who by his hand (i.e., by the union of his thumb and forefinger) shows the sign indicating the identity of the individual soul and the supreme Self,[263] who is the embodiment of bliss, who delights in the Self, and who has a charming face.[264]

Since the time of the *Upaniṣad*s, the realization of the ineffable Absolute has been understood to require the silencing of the mind.[265] To say something of the Absolute, either to affirm it or to negate it, is ultimately inadequate, since it lies beyond the sphere of thought and language, i.e., it is not conceivable as a mere object. Sai Baba's silence, too, may be understood along these lines, since through it he appears to have intended to point to the ineffability of God. Such eloquent silence is thought to have tremendous power. As the Vedāntin mystic Ramaṇa Maharṣi (1879-1950) once said:

> Preaching is simple communication of knowledge and can be done in silence too. What do you think of a man listening to a harangue for an hour and going away without being impressed by it so as to change his life? Compare him with another who sits in a holy presence and leaves after some time with his outlook on life totally changed. Which is better: to preach loudly without effect or to sit silently sending forth intuitive force to act on others?[266]

The saint of Shirdi was believed to emanate a powerful influence.[267] Ganpatrao G. Narke poignantly observed that "the *guru* does not teach, he radiates influence".[268] The *faqīr*'s silence was reputed to be most effective, since in it and through it one could, as devotees believed, hear the 'voice of God' and have access to the transformative experience of intuitively recognizing God's omnipresence.

Khaparde writes that his son Balvant "felt sad" and "wished to leave Shirdi". He naturally advised him "to ask Sayin Baba" about it. Apparently, however, Balvant did not ask the *faqīr*, or at least the diary is silent on this point. What is noteworthy is that Khaparde himself did not raise the subject with Sai Baba.

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Shirdi, Thursday 18 January 1912

There is much to record today. I got up very early, prayed,
and finding it yet wanting about an hour to the dawn, I lay
down and got up in time to see the sunrise.
I, Upasani, Bapusaheb Jog and Bhishma read Paramamrit.
Tahasildarsaheb Prahlad Ambadas, Mr. Pate[l] and his
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263 This gesture is known as *cinmudrā*, the 'seal' of consciousness.

264 *maunavyākhyāprakaṭitaparabrahmatattvaṃ yuvānaṃ varṣiṣṭhāntevasadṛṣigaṇair āvṛtaṃ brahmaniṣṭhaiḥ । ācāryendraṃ karakalitacinmudram ānandamūrtiṃ svātmārāmaṃ muditavadanaṃ dakṣiṇāmūrtim īḍe ॥*; Mahadevan, *The Hymns of Śaṅkara*, 4.

265 For a discussion of silence in the *Upaniṣad*s, see Rigopoulos, "Negazioni e silenzi", 106-10.

266 Osborne, *Teachings of Ramana Maharshi*, 90.

267 See Narasimhaswami, *Life of Sai Baba*, 3: 119.

268 Shepherd, *Biographical Investigation*, 231.

companion (Lingayat) returned to their places. *The latter two got permission just in time to start.*
We saw Sayin Baba go out and again after he returned to the Masjid. He treated me very kindly and, while I was serving, ***he told me two or three tales. He said many people came to take his money. He never resisted but let them take it away. He only noted their names and followed them. When they got down for their meals he killed them and brought his money back. The other story was that there was a blind man. He used to live near the Takia[269] here. A man enticed away his wife and eventually murdered the blind man. Four hundred men assembled at the Chavadi and condemned him. They ordered him to be decapitated. This order was carried out by the village hangman who did the work out of some motive and not merely as a piece of duty. So the murderer in the reincarnation was born as the son of the hangman.***
He then commenced another tale.
In the meantime, a stranger Fakir came and *touched Sayin Baba's feet. Sayin Baba felt very angry or rather showed that he was so and shook off the Fakir* who showed great tenacity and persistence without losing his own equanimity. At last he went out and stood near the compound wall on the outside. *Sayin Baba was angry and threw away the Arti utensils and the dishes full of food brought by his worshippers. He lifted up Ram Maruti Bua who declared afterwards that he felt very happy and as if sent off to higher regions. One Bhagya and a villager were also roughly handled by Sayin Maharaj.*
Sitaram brought the Arti and we finished the Arti in the usual, though in a somewhat hurried way. Martand,[270] son of Mhalsapati,[271] showed great presence of mind and prevented confusion by directing that the Arti should be finished when it was begun. He did so *when Sayin Baba moved out of his usual place. Before finishing Sayin Baba resumed his seat and all went much as usual, except that 'Udi' was distributed wholesale and not individually. He was not really angry of course and did the whole thing as a 'Lila'.*
The whole affair made us late and there was the feast given by Tatya Patil for the death of his father as a part of the obsequies. So we did not finish our meals till about 4:30 PM. It must have been a bit later, for after it there was no time to do anything and *we went to see Sayin Maharaj come out for his stroll. He did so as usual and we saluted him as usual.*
There was the usual Arti in the Wada. Megha was too ill to stand up and *Sayin Baba foretold his end during the night.*
We then attended the Chavadi procession it being the evening for it. I held the morchal as usual and everything went on smooth. Sitaram did the Arti.
At night there was the Bhajan of Bhishma and Ramayan of Dixit.

269 A resting house for Muslim visitors.

270 According to the sources, he was born either in 1890 or 1897; thus, he would have been 22 or 15 years old in 1912. During my field research in Shirdi in October 1985, I had the good fortune to interview him, and he claimed to be 108 years old. If this is accurate, he would have been born in 1877 and would have been 35 in 1912. Martand died in 1986; see Rigopoulos, *Oral Testimonies on Sai Baba,* 70-3, 179-82.

271 Mhalsapati Chimnaji Nagare (d. 1922), a goldsmith (*sonar*) by caste, was the hereditary priest of the local Khaṇḍobā temple and Sai Baba's first devotee. He is said to have been the one who first addressed him as 'Sai': when Sai Baba finally settled in Shirdi, Mhalsapati greeted him with the words *Āo Sāī* ('Come, Sai'). For further details on Mhalsapati, see Narasimhaswami, *Life of Sai Baba,* 2: 1-42; Satpathy, *An Inspiring Life,* 99-101; Shepherd, *Biographical Investigation,* 126-7.

> PS: I forgot to mention above that *during the torrent of hard words that Sayin Baba poured out today he repeatedly said that he had saved my son Balvant, and then often repeated the phrase "Fakir wished to kill Dadasaheb (meaning me) but I would not permit it".* He mentioned one more name, but I cannot recall it now.

The narratives reported by Khaparde may be read as articulating a coherent moral and spiritual economy centered on Sai Baba's "treasure", understood as both material and spiritual capital. Access to this treasure is not determined by outward demand but by the inner disposition and capacity of the recipient, while its misuse or misappropriation inevitably entails karmic consequences. Across these episodes, the emphasis consistently falls on intention, discipline, and preparedness, thereby reframing devotional practice as a process of ethical and psychological transformation rather than the mere pursuit of material benefits.

Khaparde records that, during the morning gathering at the mosque, Sai Baba treated him "very kindly" and, while he was massaging his legs and feet, narrated several tales expressly intended for him. In the first of these, in which the *faqīr* himself appears as the protagonist, he laments that many people "came to take his money". This expression appears to refer not only to the coins he collected as *dakṣiṇā* – which he redistributed among devotees – but also to their symbolic value. Traditional interpretations associate specific coins with spiritual virtues (e.g., *niṣṭhā* and *saburī*) or stages of devotion culminating in surrender (*śaraṇāgati*/*prapatti*).[272] More broadly, "his money" may be understood as a metaphor for the saint's total 'treasure', encompassing both material and spiritual goods.

This episode introduces a recurring motif in Sai Baba's narratives: the figure of the thief. These figures can be read as representing individuals who seek benefits – material or spiritual – for which they are unprepared. In this sense, the narratives construct a moral and spiritual economy in which access to the saint's 'treasure' depends not on desire but on inner disposition and capacity. The emphasis falls less on external action than on intention and readiness.

This interpretation is reinforced by Sai Baba's own reported words, in which he laments that although his "treasury is open", few are willing to "take pains" to obtain its true contents. Most visitors to Shirdi, as the sources suggest, sought tangible benefits – wealth, health, or progeny[273] – whereas relatively few aspired to spiritual advancement. While Sai Baba often appears to accommodate such requests,[274] the narratives consistently reframe them as secondary to a higher goal. Thus the *faqīr* sadly remarked:

272 See Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 550 (chap. 33, v. 213). See also *ibid.*, 700-1 (chap. 42, vv. 119-30). In this context, the number nine is interpreted as symbolizing nine qualities of the ideal disciple: indifference to honor, insult, and fame; attentiveness to one's spiritual welfare; absence of jealousy; detachment; dedication to the service of the *guru*; constant orientation toward the knowledge of *Brahman*; inner firmness and steadiness; freedom from envy; and avoidance of vain or senseless speech. On *śaraṇāgati*/*prapatti*, see Raman, *Self-surrender in Śrīvaiṣṇavism*.

273 See the story of the Parsi devotee Ratanji Shapoorji Wadia, a mill contractor, as narrated in chapter 14 of the *Shri Sai Satcharita*.

274 See Narasimhaswami, *Charters and Sayings*, 8.

> My master told me to give bounteously to all that ask. No one listens to me or my wisdom. My treasury is open. No one brings carts to take from it. I say dig, but none will take any pains. I said dig out the treasure and cart it away. Be the real and true sons of the mother, and fully stock your shop. What is to become of us, i.e., this bodily life? Earth will return to the earth, and the air (breath) will return to the air. This opportunity will not return.[275]

And in 1918, a few months before his demise, he bitterly stated:

> Mother, nowadays I have been much pestered. Some want wealth, some women, some sons. Hallo! What I have, none wants. I wait and wait; and one day I will suddenly disappear. I am quite disgusted.[276]

> People have got bad and give trouble. They are pestering me for money. Moreover, they become shameless. Now I am disgusted.[277]

Returning to the tale, the *faqīr* recounts that when certain individuals attempted to seize his money by force, "he never resisted but let them take it away". Nevertheless, he carefully "noted their names" and diligently "followed them", suggesting that he would not ultimately allow the undeserving to deprive the worthy of what was intended for them. The material and spiritual wealth dispensed by a saint is thus implicitly construed as sacred; its misappropriation constitutes a transgression that invites retribution. The episode may therefore be read as an illustration of karmic inevitability: wrongful actions, even if temporarily successful, inevitably generate consequences. Accordingly, when the thieves least expected it – "when they got down for their meals", a detail that may symbolize their absorption in ill-gotten gains – the *faqīr* reappears, kills them, and reclaims his property.

Within the narrative framework, this episode appears to function as a didactic assertion of the saint's control over his 'treasure'. Those who attempt to appropriate what belongs to him are consistently portrayed as failing in the end, while his true devotees are encouraged to trust in continued access to his bounty. The implicit message for Khaparde and other devotees is thus the cultivation of confidence: the saint's resources – both material and spiritual – remain available to those who approach him with the proper disposition. Bharadwaja's symbolic interpretation reinforces this reading:

> This parable describes the attentive watching of the mental processes which leads to quieting the mind and regaining of calm meditation. One-pointedness of mind, dispassion, control of senses, etc., are the wealth. Desires born of various modes like *rajas* and *tamas*, are the thieves.[278]

In this perspective, the narrative is recast in psychological terms, where 'wealth' denotes inner discipline and 'thieves' represent disruptive mental

275 Narasimhaswami, *Charters and Sayings*, 7.

276 Narasimhaswami, *Charters and Sayings*, 16. The saint spoke these words to Mrs. Tarkhad.

277 Narasimhaswami, *Charters and Sayings*, 52.

278 Bharadwaja, *Sai Baba the Master*, 95.

tendencies. A related theme emerges in Sai Baba's statement, as reported in the *Shri Sai Satcharita* (chap. 17, vv. 77-8):

> [E]at only so much as can be digested. Or else, it will result in indigestion. […] My treasury is full; I will give to whoever comes and whatever he wants, but first I see the capacity of the taker and give only as much as he can cope with.[279]

This emphasis on the recipient's capacity resonates with another tale in which Sai Baba himself appears as the protagonist:

> A person rode on a camel. It passed excreta. I gathered all the excreta and ate them up. My belly was puffed up – swollen. I felt listless. Then the rider took pity upon me. He gave me four grains of Bengal gram (*canā*, [bot.] *Cicer arietinum*) and I ate them and drank water. Thus my vehement turbulence ceased. My swollen belly subsided. Now hereafter it will be cured.[280]

The camel may be interpreted as representing divine grace, while what it expels can be read as the 'manure' of love. As an exemplary disciple, Sai Baba gathers and consumes this substance avidly, to the point of indigestion,[281] suggesting a state of excess. This 'intoxication' of divine love leaves him stupefied. The rider of the camel may in turn be understood as the *guru* who, like a skilled physician, restores balance by administering the appropriate remedy. The four grains of Bengal gram may be taken to symbolize, in one possible reading, the four components of the individual – *manas* (mind), *buddhi* (intellect), *citta* (mental faculty), and *ahaṃkāra* (ego). Once these are restored to equilibrium, the ecstatic languor subsides and the disciple is led to recognize the divine presence in everyday life. The motif of roasted gram appears in other parables of Sai Baba, where it seems to function as a means of dispelling intoxication (*māyā*) and bestowing knowledge (*jñāna*).[282] The broader implication of the tale is that, while the love of God constitutes a path to liberation, it must be accompanied by restraint and sobriety[283] – a point that resonates with the Sufi distinction between *ṣaḥw* (sobriety) and *sukr* (intoxication).[284]

The second tale summarized by Khaparde is set in Shirdi and assumes a more realistic character, though its protagonist is not the saint. An individual seduces the wife of a blind man who lived near the *takiyā* (a resting place for Muslim visitors) and subsequently murders him. The location suggests a Muslim milieu, especially given Sai Baba's early association with the

279 Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 274.

280 Narasimhaswami, *Charters and Sayings*, 276.

281 On the link between eating and devotion, see Chitluri, *Baba's Vaani*, 132. The term *bhakta* also denotes food – specifically boiled rice or, more generally, any grain cooked in water; see Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 743.

282 See Chitluri, *Baba's Vaani*, 131-3. The title given to this parable is "The grocer who had three pots of clarified butter".

283 In a similar story previously analyzed, the nine lumps of dung passed by a horse are said to represent the nine forms of devotion (*navavidhabhakti*); see Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 345.

284 On the relative superiority of sobriety over ecstasy, see Ventura, *Sapienza sufi*, 140-3.

takiyā, where he reportedly spent nights in the company of other *faqīr*s.[285] The man's blindness underscores his vulnerability and dependence upon others, his wife being his primary support. Although the pair may admit of symbolic interpretation – as representing, for instance, ignorance and desire – the narrative primarily emphasizes the victim's destitution and the perpetrator's cruelty.

The villagers – said to number four hundred – assemble at the *cāvaḍī* and unanimously condemn the murderer to death by decapitation, exemplifying retributive justice (*lex talionis*), according to which punishment corresponds to the crime. However, the narrative shifts its focus to the intention of the executioner. Khaparde notes that the hangman "did the work out of some motive and not merely as a piece of duty", suggesting that he failed to perform his *svadharma* with detachment. It may be hypothesized that personal motives – possibly including resentment or even a degree of satisfaction – informed his action. In this context, the emphasis falls on the moral significance of intention: the executioner's subsequent rebirth as the murdered man's son illustrates the inescapability of karmic retribution. The episode thus underscores the principle that actions, thoughts, and intentions alike inevitably generate consequences, reinforcing the ethical imperative to avoid resentment and excess, which perpetuate the cycle of *saṃsāra*.

As Sai Baba began narrating a third tale, a "stranger *faqīr*" appeared and interrupted him by touching his feet without permission.[286] The saint reacted with sudden anger: he rebuked the intruder, "shook him off" despite his persistence, and forced him to leave the *masjid*, although the *faqīr* remained standing outside near the compound wall. In his apparent anger, Sai Baba uttered a "torrent of hard words", threw aside the *ārtī* utensils and food offerings, lifted Ram Maruti off the ground – demonstrating notable physical strength[287] – and roughly handled two other individuals. Despite the disturbance, the devotees managed to complete the *ārtī*, albeit with difficulty and in a hurried manner.

This episode illustrates the saint's capacity for abrupt changes in demeanor. The precise reasons for his behavior are not explicitly stated; beyond the *faqīr*'s breach of etiquette, there may have been additional factors that provoked his reaction. As in other instances, Khaparde interprets the episode as a *līlā*,[288] that is, a deliberate enactment intended to convey a lesson. In this reading, the saint's actions assume a quasi-theatrical dimension. More broadly, the narrative underscores the importance attributed to proper conduct and inner disposition in approaching the saint. Khaparde's claim that the saint only appeared to be angry, while inwardly remaining free from anger, is echoed in the *Shri Sai Satcharita* (chap. 11, vv. 69-76),

285 See Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 81 (chap. 5, vv. 99-100). Sai Baba enjoyed dancing at night, especially in his youth; see Chitluri, *Baba's Divine Symphony*, 72-3. On the ritual practice of singing and dancing (*samā*) in Indian Sufism, see Ghani, *Sufi Rituals and Practices*; especially chap. 3, "Far from Delhi: *Sama* in the Deccan", 117-66.

286 On the sanctity attributed to Sai Baba's feet as a repository of his power and grace, see Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 738-51 (chap. 45, "Greatness of the Guru's Feet"). As Sai Baba is reported to have stated: "These feet are very ancient. All your care is removed. Have full faith in me. Soon, you will be fulfilled"; *ibid*., 793 (chap. 48, v. 147).

287 Sai Baba appears to have possessed considerable physical strength, and is reported to have been fond of wrestling in his youth.

288 The concept of *līlā* conveys the idea of divine freedom from the constraints of the human condition, particularly desire and *karman*.

where Sai Baba is described as outwardly displaying rage while inwardly embodying compassion:

> [T]hese Pooja rituals were allowed only when it pleased Baba. Otherwise Baba would throw away the Pooja offerings, exhibiting the wrath and temper of Narasimha[289] himself. And while in this terrible form, who had the courage to stand near him? Seeing him so incensed, each and everyone ran for the fear of his life. Suddenly flying into a rage, he would sometimes take out his anger on the devotees. At other times, softer even than wax, he would be the very image of Tranquillity and Forgiveness. Sometimes he appeared as ferocious as the Fire of Universal Destruction and kept the devotees as on the sharp edge of a sword. But sometimes he was cheerful and even softer than butter. Outwardly, he may tremble with rage; rotate his eyeballs vigorously; but at heart, there flowed a spring of compassion, as in a mother for her child. In the very next moment, he regained his usual calm and composure and called out loudly to the devotees to come to him, saying, "Even if I seem to be angry with someone, my heart knows no anger. Should a mother push her child away with a kick, or the ocean send the river back, only then is it possible that I will repulse you or harm you in any way. I am absolutely in the power of my devotees and stand by their side. For ever I am hungering after their love and readily answer their call in distress".[290]

Khaparde further notes that Sai Baba "foretold Megha's end during the night". During the *cāvaḍī* procession, the diarist continued his customary service by holding the *morchal* (peacock-feather fan), a gesture that signifies honor and devotion.

In a postscript, Khaparde records that Sai Baba repeatedly declared that he had "saved his son Balvant", implying protection from the plague. It may be conjectured that the saint's earlier outburst was directed, at least in part, against the epidemic itself. Khaparde's diary indicates that Balvant fell ill the following day and remained bedridden for approximately three weeks. On 8 February, however, he reports that the boy was able to visit the *masjid* and bow at Sai Baba's feet, noting a marked improvement. This chronology implicitly attributes to Sai Baba a form of anticipatory knowledge. Regarding this incident, the *Shri Sai Satcharita* relates that the *faqīr* took the boy's illness upon himself:

> Oh, how much can I describe to the listeners of the marvellous *leelas* of Baba! Once the epidemic of plague broke out in the village. Just listen to the miracle that took place then! Dadasaheb Khaparde had a very young son who was at Shirdi, with his mother, enjoying the great happiness of

289 Lit. 'man-lion'. Viṣṇu's fourth *avatāra*, so called because of his human torso and lion's head. In this form, he emerges from a pillar in a state of wrath and disembowels the demon king Hiraṇyakaśipu, who had attempted to prevent his son Prahlāda from worshipping Viṣṇu.

290 Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 171-2.

> Baba's company. The boy was very small.[291] Moreover, he was burning with a high fever, which seemed to break the mother's heart. She grew very restless. As her home was at Amravati, she thought she should go back thither. So, finding a suitable opportunity in the evening, she came to take Baba's permission. During his evening round, as Baba came near the *wada*, the lady came and clasped his feet, relating to him what had happened. As it is, women are nervous by nature, and then, the child's shivering would not stop. Moreover, there was the fear of the dreaded plague. She kept on harping on what had happened. Gently Baba said, "The sky is overcast, but it will rain, bringing forth the harvest and the clouds will all melt away. Why be afraid?" So saying, he lifted his *kafni* up to the waist and showed the inflamed buboes to everyone. The size of a hen's egg, four inflamed buboes could be seen spread in four directions. "See, I have to take upon myself all your sufferings", said Baba. Seeing this extraordinary divine act, people were amazed. Oh, how these saints take upon themselves the innumerable sufferings of their devotees! They have a heart softer than wax itself, – as if it were a lump of butter! Their love for the devotees is truly selfless, for the devotees alone are their kith and kin![292]

The metaphorical expression "the sky is overcast" may be understood as referring to the onset of the disease, while the subsequent "rain" and dispersal of clouds signify its resolution. The dark clouds may be taken to symbolize the buboes, whose eventual bursting and disappearance would signify recovery. Notably, Khaparde's diary remains silent regarding this miraculous episode, a discrepancy that merits further consideration.

Finally, Khaparde records that during his outburst Sai Baba exclaimed: "The Fakir wishes to kill Dadasaheb, but I would not permit it". This statement may be interpreted as suggesting that Khaparde himself was destined to die – whether due to illness or external circumstances – but that the saint intervened to alter this outcome. The episode thus reinforces the portrayal of Sai Baba as a figure capable of mediating, or even overriding, the forces that govern human destiny.

More broadly, it reaffirms the central concern of these narratives with the regulation of access to spiritual 'treasure' through intention, capacity, and moral discipline.

291 According to `http://saiamrithadhara.com/mahabhakthas/dadasaheb_khaparde.html`, 7, the boy was only two months old when he fell ill, and Sai Baba is said to have given him the name Balvant. However, this appears difficult to reconcile with the fact that by 1912 Balvant would already have been in his twenties; indeed, as early as 11 September 1911, Khaparde refers to Balvant's wedding in his diary (National Archives of India, New Delhi, *Diaries of G.S. Khaparde*, 11 September 1911, Microfilm Repository, Identifier: MF_222400056290).

292 Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 113-14 (chap. 7, vv. 100-10). See also Satpathy, *An Inspiring Life*, 159-60, 301; Narasimhaswami, *Charters and Sayings*, 165; Kher, "Shirdi Diary and Mrs. Khaparde", 130-3.

> Shirdi, Friday 19 January 1912
>
> This was a very sad day. I got up very early and after finishing my prayers discovered that it yet wanted an hour or so to day break. So I lay down and was aroused for Kakad Arti by Bapusaheb Jog.
> Dixit Kaka told me that Megha died about 4 AM.
> The Kakad Arti was done but *Sayin Maharaj did not show his face clear and did not appear to open his eyes. He never threw any glances spreading grace.*
> After we returned, arrangements were made for the cremation of Megha's body. *Sayin Baba came just as the body was being brought out and loudly lamented his death. His voice was so touching that it brought tears to every eye. He followed the body up to the bend in the made road near the village and then went his usual way.* Megha's body was taken under the Bada tree and consigned to flames there. *Sayin Baba could be distinctly heard lamenting his death even at that distance and he was seen waving his hands and swaying as if in Arti to say goodbye.* There was a good supply of dry fuel and flames soon rose very high. Dixit Kaka, myself, Bapusaheb Jog, Upasani, Dada Kelkar and all else here were there and praised the lot of Megha that *his body was seen and touched by Sayin Baba on the head, heart, and shoulders, and feet.*
> After finishing the ceremonies, we ought to have sat praying, but Bapusaheb Jog came and I sat talking with him. When later I went to see Sayin Baba, *he asked me how I spent the afternoon.* I was very sorry to confess that I had wasted it in talking. This was a lesson to me.
> I remembered how Sayin Baba foretold his death three days ago: "*This is the last Arti of Megha*", how Megha felt that he had completed his service and was passing away, how he shed tears to think that he could not see Sathe whom he regarded as his Guru, and how he directed that the cows of Sayin Baba should be let loose. He never expressed any other wish. We all admired his life of extreme devotion and I was sorry that I did not rest in prayer but listened to meaningless talk.
> Bhishma and my son Balvant are not well, so there was no Bhajan. Dixit Kaka read Ramayan at night.
> Gupte, his brother and their families left this morning for Bombay.

Khaparde reports that Sai Baba had foretold Megha's death three days earlier, on 16 January. Although the cause of death is not specified, it may be conjectured that Megha fell victim to the plague that was then prevalent in the region. The saint's loud lamentations for the passing of his devoted follower and *ārtī* officiant – audible from a considerable distance – reveal a markedly human dimension; they were, as Khaparde notes, "so touching that [they] brought tears to every eye". From early morning, Sai Baba is described as withdrawn, evidently in mourning, "not showing his face clear, not opening his eyes and never throwing glances spreading grace". When Megha's body was taken for cremation, he accompanied the procession for some distance and "waved his hand and swayed as if in Arti to say goodbye". This detail is particularly striking, as Sai Baba appears to identify himself with Megha by imitating his characteristic movements during the *ārtī*.

The *Shri Sai Satcharita* (chap. 31, vv. 121-3) offers a parallel account:

> When the villagers went to cremate him, accompanied by all the devotees, Baba also went to the cremation grounds, and showered flowers on Megha. After the last rites were performed, there were tears in Baba's eyes too, like an ordinary, sorrowing man, who is caught up in the web of *Maya*. Very lovingly, Baba covered the corpse with flowers by his own hands and turned back, bemoaning the loss in a sorrowful tone.[293]

Khaparde further observes that he and the other devotees "praised the lot of Megha" insofar as his body was seen and touched by Sai Baba on the head, heart, shoulders, and feet. Such contact, especially in light of prevailing Hindu notions of ritual pollution, was regarded as a rare blessing and indicative of the saint's high esteem for the deceased. The *faqīr*'s touch (*sparśana*) was widely believed to possess extraordinary potency, capable of inducing ecstatic states and effecting miraculous transformations, including the expulsion of malevolent forces.[294]

The symbolism of the *ārtī* ritual further illuminates Megha's spiritual status. Just as camphor burns completely, leaving no residue while diffusing light and fragrance, so it was believed that Megha's ego had been wholly extinguished through his devotion to Sai Baba, allowing his soul to merge with the supreme *Brahman*.

It is also noteworthy that Sai Baba indirectly reproached Khaparde for having spent the afternoon in idle conversation rather than in spiritual practice – an admonition that, as the diarist records, was not without precedent. The saint appears to have consistently expected visitors to Shirdi, irrespective of religious affiliation, to engage in devotional discipline and to avoid frivolous talk.

Finally, Khaparde notes that "Bhishma and my son Balvant are not well, so there was no Bhajan". As previously observed, from this point onward Balvant's condition would worsen considerably, and he would remain bedridden for several weeks, most likely as a result of the plague.

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Shirdi, Saturday 20 January 1912

In the morning I got up in time to say my prayers before
day break and commence the routine of life here to suit
everybody else.
The day promised to be pleasant, and so it turned out. I
read Paramamrit with Bapusaheb Jog, Upasani and Ram Maruti.
Bhishma and my son Balvant are unwell.
We saw Sayin Maharaj go out and again after he returned. He
sat chatting pleasantly.
```

293 Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 510.

294 See Chitluri, *Baba's Vaani*, 55. In September 1936, Sri Narayan Asram told Narasimhaswami: "Baba had a way of touching (with his palm) the head of the devotee who went to him. […] [H]is touch did convey certain impulses, forces, ideas, etc. Sometimes he pressed his hand heavily on the head as though he was crushing out some of the lower impulses of the devotee. Sometimes he tapped, sometimes he made a pass with the palm over the head, etc. Each had its own effect – making remarkable difference in the sensations or feelings of the devotee" (Narasimhaswami, *Devotees' Experiences*, 64).

> Presently a Jahagirdar[295] of a village somewhere hereabout came and Sayin Baba *would not let him approach, much less worship*. Many people interceded for him in vain. Appa Kote came and did his utmost to secure at least the usual kind of Puja for the Jahagirdar and *Sayin Baba relented so far as to let him enter the Masjid and worship the pillar near the fire-place, but he would not give Udi. I thought Sayin Baba would get angry but he did not*, and our midday Arti passed off in the usual way.
> *Bapusaheb Jog has been ordered by Sayin Baba to do all the Artis at all times*. I predicted this result two days before Megha passed off.
> After the midday meal I sat reading the newspapers.
> Dixit's younger brother, who practices at Khandwa, came this morning and his Bombay agent came in the afternoon. Dixit's brother tried to induce Dixit to return to work in vain. He applied to Sayin Baba, but *Sayin Baba left the whole matter to Dixit himself*.
> Bapusaheb Jog has also got four guests. The husband of his wife's sister who is the chief Treasury officer at Sangli has come here with his whole family on his way back from the Delhi Darbar. His wife wished to take Mrs. Bapusaheb Jog with her but *Sayin Maharaj would not permit it*.
> *We saw Sayin Saheb as he came out for his evening stroll*.
> Then there was the Wada Arti and later on the Shej Arti.
> Dixit read Ramayan as usual. There was no Bhajan as Bhishma is indisposed and my son Balvant is slightly worse.
> There is here Mr. Moreshwar Janardhan Pathare with his wife. He is the victim of paralysis and has suffered much.
> Joshi of Wasai has come and brought some printed copies of the prayers sung here.

The diarist's observation that Sai Baba "sat chatting pleasantly" is particularly valuable, as it captures the informal atmosphere that characterized the *faqīr*'s interactions with his devotees in the *masjid* during his public gatherings (*darbār*). In general, access to the mosque appears to have been open, allowing visitors to present their requests or questions and to converse freely with Sai Baba. As noted earlier, however, such accessibility was not without exceptions: on certain occasions, the saint refused entry to specific individuals.

Khaparde records the case of a landowner from a village near Shirdi. For reasons known only to himself, Sai Baba initially refused to allow this individual to approach him, let alone to perform acts of worship, despite repeated attempts by others to intercede on his behalf. Only after considerable insistence did the saint relent, permitting the man to enter the mosque and offer his *pūjā* – not to Sai Baba directly, but to a pillar near the sacred fire. This arrangement appears to have functioned as a compromise in such situations. Moreover, Sai Baba did not bestow upon the *jagīrdār* the sacred ash (*udī*) that he customarily distributed to devotees as a sign of grace. Khaparde notes that he "thought Sayin Baba would get angry" at the man's unwelcome presence in the *masjid*, but no such reaction occurred. The *faqīr*'s demeanor remained unaffected, and the proceedings continued without disruption, culminating in the usual midday *ārtī*.

295 A holder of landed property granted by the government as a reward; the correct spelling is *jagīrdār*.

Equally noteworthy is Sai Baba's explicit instruction to Bapusaheb Jog "to do all the Artis at all times" in place of the deceased Megha, as Khaparde had anticipated. This directive suggests that, although the saint did not actively promote congregational worship, he nonetheless wished it to continue for the benefit of the devotees. From that point onward, Jog performed all of Sai Baba's *ārtī*s – at the *masjid*, the *cāvaḍī*, Sathe's and Dixit's *vāḍā*s, and the *gurusthān* –[296] a practice that continued until the saint's death in October 1918. The persistence of such rituals also reflects the intensity of devotion among Hindu *bhakta*s, for whom the cessation of worship would have been unthinkable.

Khaparde concludes his entry by noting that "Joshi of Wasai has come and brought some printed copies of the prayers sung here", that is, the *ārtī*s, presumably with the aim of disseminating them more widely and standardizing their performance. A few years later, in 1916, Sai Baba is said to have instructed the devotee K.R. Pradhan to construct a temple dedicated to him at Ukrool (Bhivpuri Road), near Karjat in the Raigad District – apparently the first of its kind. According to one account:

> Baba picked up one of his brass replicas given to him by a devotee and handing it to Pradhan said, "Go back to Bhivpuri. Erect a temple and place this replica of me in it. Start all the functions there and don't come here again, for that is your Shirdi".[297]

In a similar vein, Sai Baba generally permitted his devotees in Shirdi to offer individual *pūjā*.[298] The *Shri Sai Satcharita* (chap. 31, vv. 24-6) provides a vivid description of such practices:

> It was the morning '*darbar*' (court) and the mosque was packed with people. The *pooja* articles that the devotees had brought and the rituals that were being performed were quite amazing to the *sanyasin*. Some devotees were washing Baba's feet; taking the holy water from Baba's toe – in a spoon, some were drinking it while others applied it to their eyes. Yet others were applying the sandalwood-paste to him while some smeared him with fragrant perfume. They had become quite oblivious of the caste-restrictions between the Brahmins, Shudras and other castes.[299]

Against this background, Khaparde notes that the villager Appa Kote "did his utmost to secure at least the usual kind of Puja" for the *jagīrdār*, yet all such efforts proved unsuccessful.

296 See Chitluri, *Baba's Rinanubandh*, 69.

297 Chitluri, *Baba's Vaani*, 48-9.

298 Apparently, the first devotee to be permitted to perform *pūjā* to Sai Baba was the local follower Mhalsapati, who applied sandalwood paste (*candana*) to the saint's throat. He was subsequently followed by Sitaram Dengle and Bapu, the son of Nanasaheb Chandorkar. In 1900, when Bapu was only four years old, he is said to have innocently applied sandalwood paste to Sai Baba's forehead, thereby initiating the practice of his ritual worship. From that point onward, such worship appears to have been generally permitted; see Pradhan, *Shri Sai Baba of Shirdi*, 47; Chitluri, *Baba's Rinanubandh*, 171.

299 Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 502.

> Shirdi, Sunday 21 January 1912
>
> I got up and attended the Kakad Arti. There were all the usual people except Bala Shimpi.
> *After the Arti, Sayin Baba followed the usual custom of using hard words against the internal enemies, by naming them as Appa Kote, Telis, Waman Tatya, etc. etc.*
> I read Paramamrit with Bapusaheb Jog, Upasani and Ram Maruti. The guest of Bapusaheb Jog from Sangli attended our class. His name is Limaye.
> *We saw Sayin Baba go out and again after he returned to the Masjid.*
> While we were at the Masjid, Madhavrao Deshpande returned from Nagar. There was Dadasaheb Karandikar with him and a gentleman of Baroda. I was very much surprised to see Karandikar. It appears he came to Nagar on a case and meeting Madhavrao Deshpande there decided to see Sayin Baba. We sat talking. Since getting into the council, he is convinced of the insincerity of Gokhale and Western professions. He returned to Nagar about 4:30 PM.
> The Limayes also went. *Permission was refused to them at first but subsequently granted by Sayin Baba.* Sadashivrao Dixit wished to go also, but *was told to depart tomorrow morning with his family, children and Ram Maruti.*
> *We saw Sayin Baba at the evening stroll* and had Dixit's Ramayan after the evening Arti at the Wada.

After the morning *ārtī,* Khaparde notes that Sai Baba "followed the usual custom of using hard words against the internal enemies". This remark suggests that the saint regularly directed loud verbal abuse toward such "enemies", and that the inhabitants of Shirdi were well accustomed to this aspect of his behavior. Khaparde's observation that "Appa Kote, Telis, Waman Tatya, etc., etc." were the 'names' assigned to the internal enemies of man – lust, anger, greed, and the like – demonstrates his familiarity with Sai Baba's allusive mode of expression. It is likely that Khaparde acquired an understanding of these symbolic equivalences through close associates of the saint, such as Madhavrao Deshpande, or perhaps even directly from Sai Baba himself.

Raghunath Pandurang Karandikar (1857-1935) was a pleader and a close associate of Khaparde who shared his political outlook, being one of Bal Gangadhar Tilak's trusted lieutenants.[300] Khaparde's remark that Karandikar was "convinced of the insincerity" of Gopal Krishna Gokhale (1866-1915), the leader of the Congress Moderates, would likely have confirmed his own long-held views regarding Gokhale. It appears that Karandikar's visit to Shirdi was motivated less by a desire to see Sai Baba than by an interest in meeting Khaparde and learning about his future plans. After conversing with him, Karandikar departed and returned to Ahmednagar.

300 On R.P. Karandikar, see Kunte, *Source Material*, 7, 9, 17, 42, 399, 490; Wolpert, *Tilak and Gokhale*, 266, 276, 284; Johnson, *Provincial Politics and Indian Nationalism*, 167, 171, 185.

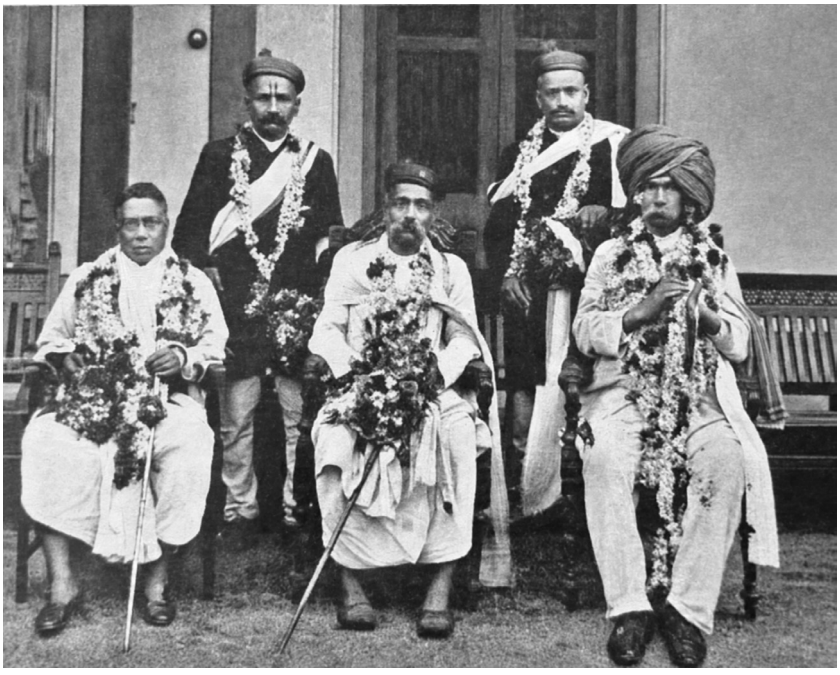

Figure 40 From left to right, B.Ch. Pal, R.P. Karandikar, B.G. Tilak, N.Ch. Kelkar, and G.S. Khaparde

Shirdi, Monday 22 January 1912

In the morning I got up early, prayed, and saw Sadashivrao Dixit, Haralal, Ram Maruti and the ladies of the first and the children Babu and Subhadra whom we call Subhi off. *They got permission to return last night.*
Then I began the routine of the day and read Paramamrit with Bapusaheb Jog, Upasani and Bhishma who is slightly better today. My son Balvant had two motions this morning. They will do him immense good.
We saw Sayin Maharaj go out and again after he returned. During the course of the worship he put two flowers in his two nostrils and put two other between his ears and the head. My attention was drawn to this by Madhavrao Deshpande. I thought this was an instruction. Sayin Baba repeated the same thing a second time and when I interpreted it a second time in my own mind he offered the chilim to me and this confirmed me. He said something which I noted instantly and particularly wished to remember, but it went clean out of my mind and no efforts made all through the day could bring it back. I am most surprised as this is the first experience of the kind. Sayin Baba also said that his order was supreme (Bala) which I understood to mean that I need not be anxious about the health of my son.
By the time the midday Arti was finished and we returned, I found Mrs. Lakshmibai Kaulgi[301] standing in front of my lodging. I was very glad to see her. She arrived at the Masjid

301 Also known as Kaujalgi and Mawshibai.

> just as I left and *saluted Sayin Maharaj. The latter showed special favor by letting her worship then.*
> After meals I lay down for a few minutes and Dixit read Ramayan and some Gathas of Nath Maharaj.[302] Upasani was present and Mrs. Lakshmibai Kaulgi attended the class. She joined in the conversation and appeared to be well informed in Vedanta. *We saw Sayin Baba at the evening stroll and again at Shej Arti.*
> Lakshmibai sang a few songs. She is an aunt (mavasi) of Radhakrishna Bai. At night at my request she did a little Bhajan and Dixit read Ramayan.

The diarist records another intriguing symbolic gesture that the *faqīr* performed twice, apparently as a form of instruction. It was Madhavrao Deshpande who first drew Khaparde's attention to Sai Baba's actions. Unfortunately, although Khaparde remarks that he believed his (second) mental interpretation of the gesture to be correct – on the grounds that Sai Baba's subsequent offering of the *cilīm* implicitly confirmed it – he does not provide any details of this interpretation. The unspecified flowers that the *faqīr* placed in his nostrils and behind his ears had been offered during the congregational worship of the midday *ārtī*.[303] More generally, flowers function as symbols of beauty, purity, devotion, and the devotee's surrender to the deity to whom they are offered.

The precise meaning of this gesture remains difficult to determine, and any interpretation must therefore remain speculative. It is possible that, by placing flowers in his nostrils and inhaling their fragrance,[304] Sai Baba sought to suggest that devotees should cultivate a purity comparable to that of flowers. Such purity, in turn, might be achieved through the sanctification of the senses, particularly hearing (*śravaṇa*), which constitutes an initial and essential stage on the path of *bhakti*. This may account for the placement of flowers behind the ears.

At the same time, the gesture may be read as implying that the *faqīr* required no external offerings. Rather, what he sought from his devotees was the 'fragrant flower' of the heart – nourished by the waters of devotion and brought to bloom by the light of knowledge. Indirect support for this interpretation may be found in Sai Baba's well-known exposition of *Bhagavadgītā* 4.34, as conveyed to Nanasaheb Chandorkar:

> In your heart, contemplate on Hari-*guru*; with your ears, listen to his Life Story; let the mind meditate ceaselessly on his form and the tongue chant his name. Go walking to the place of Hari-*guru*; with the nose inhale the fragrance of his *nirmalya* [= the flowers offered at the time of *pūjā*]; fold your hands in obeisance to his feet and with the eyes, take his *darshan*. In this way, when the inclinations of all the sense organs are lovingly

302 The Marāṭhī songs (*gāthā*) that narrate the life and deeds of Eknāth.

303 A source reports that Sai Baba was fond of the fragrance of a type of white jasmine known as *vat mogra*; see Chitluri, *Baba's Vaani*, 11. Tarabai – who was a child when she visited Shirdi in 1914 – recalls: "I knew he [= Sai Baba] liked flowers, especially marigold flowers, as he tended to the huge garden full of marigold flowers that grew close to his neem tree"; Chitluri, *Baba's Divine Symphony*, 76. Sai Baba is also reported to have appreciated *bakul* flowers; see "Remembering the Tendulkars", https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T1k7Q3SKjqo, which recounts an episode involving the devotee Savitribai Tendulkar. See also Rigopoulos, *Life and Teachings*, 243.

304 Hagiographical accounts report that, on occasion, Sai Baba manifested his presence by miraculously suffusing a place with the fragrance of flowers or incense; see Chitluri, *Baba's Vaani*, 72.

> directed towards Him, blessed will be the state of the devotees. What else is this but God-devotion![305]

Khaparde further remarks upon his inability to recall something Sai Baba had said – words that he had "noted instantly and particularly wished to remember", yet which eluded him despite reflecting on them "all through the day". He describes this as "the first experience of the kind". This was consistent with the belief that the *faqīr*'s words could be retained only if he permitted it; otherwise, they would inevitably be forgotten. Khaparde thus interpreted his failure of memory as an expression of Sai Baba's inscrutable will. It is also noteworthy that Sai Baba assured him that "his order was supreme", the term *bala* (lit. 'might' or 'power') being understood by the diarist as an indication that he need not be concerned about his son's illness, since the *faqīr* remained fully in control of the situation.

Khaparde also observes that Sai Baba showed "special favor" to Mrs. Lakshmibai Kaulgi – an aunt of Radhakrishna Bai – who, although she arrived in Shirdi too late to participate in the midday *ārtī*, was nevertheless permitted to perform worship.[306] An educated Brahmin woman, she took part in the study sessions conducted by Dixit and demonstrated a sound knowledge of Vedānta. Her participation suggests that such gatherings were not strictly restricted to men, indicating a degree of inclusivity within the devotional and intellectual life of the community.

Shirdi, Tuesday 23 January 1912

I got up in time for the Kakad Arti and finished my prayers a little after day break.
Sayin Baba today, in leaving his bed, did not say even a single word but when we saw him go out as usual he showed a very jocose mood. Noticing the absence of Kaka Dixit, said he was busy clearing his bowels. When he appeared, Sayin Saheb said: "You did not clear yourself but thought you would bow to me first". We laughed and then I returned [to the *vāḍā*] and read Paramamrit with Upasani, Bapusaheb Jog and Bhishma and then *went to see Sayin Baba at the Masjid. He was in a reticent mood and never said a word* and the midday Arti passed off quietly.
After it we returned [to the *vāḍā*] and had our meals. *Madhavrao has obtained permission to send Sayin Baba's photo and Udi to Hon'ble Mrs. Russell.* I wished to write to her but did not feel myself in the mood and sat talking with a schoolmaster who has come here recently with his family to see Sayin Baba.
Dixit read Ramayan and then *we went to see Sayin Baba at his evening stroll. He did not say much even then.*
At night, Bhishma for the first time in this week had his Bhajan. Some young men of the village also came to sing Bhajan and then Dixit read Ramayan.
Mrs. Lakshmibai Kaulgi thinks of staying here always and Sayin Baba said she might do so for good.
My son Balvant perspired this morning a little.

305 Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 651 (chap. 39, vv. 95-7).

306 In her heartfelt devotion, she would massage Sai Baba quite vigorously; see the account of her confrontation with Anna Chinchnikar in Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 398-403 (chap. 24, vv. 90-142).

Khaparde notes the saint's taciturnity and "reticent mood", which he maintained throughout the day, despite having displayed "a very jocose mood" in the morning, when he teased Dixit for his absence at the time of *darśan*, having given precedence to "clearing his bowels".

It is noteworthy that Madhavrao Deshpande, once again acting as an intermediary for Khaparde, obtained the *faqīr*'s permission to send the latter's photograph and sacred ash (*udī*) to "Hon'ble Mrs. Russell". This episode suggests that Sai Baba did not appear to make distinctions between Indians and non-Indians, and that his reputation was beginning to extend even among British circles.[307] Khaparde indicates that he knew Mrs. Russell and had intended to write to her, although he ultimately did not feel inclined to do so. References to a "Lady Russell" from London appear in his diary entries of June and July 1919, indicating that she was a personal acquaintance and political contact whom he had met during his stay in England between 1908 and 1910.[308]

"Hon'ble Mrs. Russell" may plausibly be identified as Adah Adeline Russell (née Williams; 1867-1959), wife of the Hon. Charles Russell. An important clue to her identity is provided by Khaparde himself. On 5 September 1910, shortly before his departure from England, he recorded that Mrs. Russell had invited him to dinner to bid him farewell, giving her address as "16 Langham Mansions, Earl's Court Square S.W.".[309] A London street directory lists "Russell Hon. Mrs. Charles" at precisely this address. The correspondence between Khaparde's reference to her as "Hon'ble Mrs. Russell" and the directory entry, together with the identical address, strongly suggests that the woman he knew was Adah Russell.

Adah Russell belonged by marriage to a prominent British legal and political family. Her husband, the Hon. Charles Russell, who had acted as solicitor for the Marquess of Queensberry in Oscar Wilde's celebrated libel action of 1895, was a son of Charles Russell, Baron Russell of Killowen (1832-1900), who became Lord Chief Justice of England in 1894. She was herself the granddaughter of Sir Joshua Walmsley (1794-1871), a Liberal politician and one of the founders of the *Daily News*.

Khaparde's diary entry of 5 September also indicates that his relationship with Mrs. Russell was more than merely casual. She invited him to what he described as "a sort of farewell dinner" shortly before his return to India; afterwards she accompanied him to Wilfrid Blunt's house in Chapel Street, Belgrave Square, where Khaparde spent the evening in Blunt's company

307 This episode recalls the visit to Shirdi on 10 March 1911 of George Seymour Curtis, Revenue Commissioner for the Central Division, accompanied by his wife. Mrs. Curtis, who was childless, hoped that Sai Baba would bless her with offspring. The *faqīr* is said to have tested them by asking them to wait for some time; however, Mr. Curtis grew impatient and decided to leave, with the result that they were unable to speak with him. For this episode, see Kher, *Sai Baba*, 117-20; Shepherd, *Biographical Investigation*, 120-22; Chitluri, *Baba's Vaani*, 27-8. For a comparable account of "a highly-placed English gentleman from Bombay" who visited Sai Baba, see Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 134-5 (chap. 9, vv. 21-35).

308 In an entry dated 24 June 1919, Khaparde notes: "Lady Russell said that on knowing the names of the Joint Committee on the Indian Reforms, she will do what lies in her power". In a subsequent entry of 3 July 1919, he writes: "[S]eeing the names of the Joint Committee in the *Times*, copied them and sent them off to Mr. Blunt, Lady Russell and Mr. Hyndman, asking each to help, in securing interest for India"; Kunte, *Source Material*, 461-2. The two men may be identified as Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (1840-1922) and Henry Hyndman (1842-1921), respectively.

309 National Archives of India, New Delhi, *Diaries of G.S. Khaparde*, 5 September 1910, Microfilm Repository, Identifier: MF_222400056289.

before returning with her to Earl's Court. The episode places Mrs. Russell within the same interconnected London circle through which Khaparde developed contacts among sympathetic British figures. Her position within a prominent Liberal legal and political milieu, together with her evident acquaintance with Blunt,[310] thus provides a more precise social context for Khaparde's association with her.

It is possible that Khaparde remained in contact with Mrs. Russell after his return to India. The circumstances surrounding the subsequent sending of Sai Baba's photograph and *udī* to her are not sufficiently documented to determine whether Mrs. Russell had expressed an interest in Sai Baba, had confided some personal or family concern to Khaparde, or Khaparde himself had taken the initiative. The latter explanations remain plausible, particularly since the sending of the photograph and *udī* followed Sai Baba's authorization conveyed through Madhavrao Deshpande.

Whatever prompted the gesture, the episode provides a small but suggestive indication of the channels through which knowledge of Sai Baba could circulate beyond India during his lifetime. Khaparde's years in Britain had brought him into contact with a diverse circle of British acquaintances and at least some of the relationships formed there appear to have survived his return to India. The transmission of Sai Baba's photograph and *udī* to Mrs. Russell thus offers a revealing instance of how Khaparde's transnational personal networks could become conduits through which objects associated with the saint – and, with them, something of his reputation for sanctity – passed beyond the immediate devotional world of Shirdi.

Finally, Khaparde notes that Mrs. Kaulgi expressed a wish to spend the remainder of her life in Shirdi, to which the *faqīr* reportedly responded that she might do so permanently. This remark suggests a degree of favor on Sai Baba's part, given that such permission appears to have been granted only rarely.

> Shirdi, Wednesday 24 January 1912
>
> Somehow I overslept myself this morning. This made me late for everything. I had to hurry through all my usual routine. Somehow Mr. Dixit was also late and everybody appeared to be in the same predicament.
> *We saw Sayin Baba go out* and then read Paramamrit with Upasani, Bhishma and Bapusaheb Jog.
> *I then went to the Masjid to see Sayin Baba.*
> Lakshmibai Kaulgi attended our Paramamrit class and went to the Masjid after I reached. *Sayin Baba called her his mother-in-law and made a joke about her saluting him*. This gave me the idea that she has been accepted by him as a disciple.
> The midday Arti passed off in usual way rather quietly.
> On my return from it, I found Mr. Sane, Mamlatdar of Kopargaon, sitting in the verandah. He was doing revenue work in connection with the extension of Gaothan[311] and the removal of the cemetery and the burning ghat.
> After meal, I tried to write a few letters but sat talking with Mr. Sane.
> Then Mr. Dixit read Ramayan and later on *I went to the*

310 In the early years of the 20th century, Mrs. Russell had a romantic relationship with Blunt; see Longford, *A Pilgrimage of Passion*, 347-8, 353.

311 The site of the village.

> *Masjid to see Sayin Saheb, but as all were dismissed soon, I took Udi*, and stood near the Chavadi. I met there the Mohamedan Kabirpanthi gentleman who came to Amravati some time ago with Sathaye and Asnare.
> In the evening there was the Arti at the Wada and then Shej Arti at the Chavadi. I held the morchal as usual.

Lakshmibai Kaulgi is identified as an aunt of Radhakrishna Bai, who was a Brahmin widow and an ardent devotee of the Shirdi saint, and who revered him as Viṭṭhala (i.e., Kṛṣṇa). Sai Baba's reference to Lakshmibai Kaulgi as "his mother-in-law" reflects his characteristic penchant for playful nicknaming and the creation of symbolic familial relationships among his *bhakta*s. Khaparde interprets this designation as indicating that the saint had accepted her as a disciple.[312] His jest concerning her saluting him further underscores this dynamic: in conventional hierarchical terms, he ought to have bowed to her, given her status as his notional "mother-in-law". As Kevin Shepherd observes, "the reference to Kaulgi as 'mother-in-law' implies a marital association",[313] thereby obliquely suggesting the spiritual stature of her niece, Radhakrishna Bai, who had resided in the village since 1908 and was held in considerable esteem by the *faqīr*.

The presence in Shirdi of Mr. Sane, Mamlatdar of Kopargaon, "in connection with the extension of the Gaothan and the removal of the cemetery and the burning ghat", was likely connected to the plague epidemic and the consequent implementation of public health measures aimed at safeguarding the population.

Khaparde's note that a "Mohamedan Kabirpanthi gentleman" – that is, an adherent of the spiritual lineage of the sant Kabīr, whom Khaparde had previously encountered in Amravati – came to pay homage to Sai Baba is particularly noteworthy, especially in light of Sai Baba's frequent identification with the 15th-century poet-saint of Benares.

Finally, Khaparde records with evident satisfaction that, during the evening procession at the *cāvaḍī*, he "held the morchal as usual", a service he regarded as a valued privilege.

> Shirdi, Thursday 25 January 1912
>
> Madhavrao Deshpande woke me up in the morning and said that he had to call me more than once before I answered his call. I prayed and attended the Kakad Arti. *Sayin Baba walked to the Masjid in silence*.
> On return we held our Paramamrit class with Upasani, Bapusaheb Jog, Bhishma and Mrs. Kaulgi. We finished the chapter on Mahavakya Vivek.[314]
> *Then we saw Sayin Saheb both when he went out and after he returned to Masjid*.
> The midday Arti went off as usual and *Sayin Saheb gave me smoke very often*.
> After meals I lay down for a while and then we had Ramayan.

312 Bharadwaja's interpretation appears strained: "Her mind is the daughter of her soul which she surrendered to Baba and hence she is his mother-in-law"; Bharadwaja, *Sai Baba the Master*, 96.

313 Shepherd, *Faqir of Shirdi*, 140.

314 Lit. 'discrimination of the great saying'. This is the title of chapter three of the *Paramāmṛt*, which expounds the *mahāvākya* 'That thou are' (*tat tvam asi*) from *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.8.7.

> Dixit read it, and later on *went to see Sayin Baba. He was in a pleased mood.*
> At night there was the Wada Arti, Bhishma's Bhajan and Dixit's Ramayan.
> I may mention the fact that in the evening, at stroll time, ***Sayin Baba told me nearly the whole previous history of Mrs. Lakshmibai Kaulgi***. I knew it to be correct as I knew the facts.

Khaparde records that it was only thanks to Madhavrao Deshpande – who came to his lodgings and repeatedly called out to him – that he was able to awaken. Madhavrao emerges as a constant presence throughout Khaparde's diary entries and appears to have been his closest companion in Shirdi, regularly accompanying him to Sai Baba at the *masjid* and serving as an intermediary between devotee and saint. This sustained proximity suggests the high regard in which Khaparde was held within the village; it is plausible, moreover, to conjecture that Sai Baba himself may have entrusted Madhavrao with the task of attending to Khaparde's needs.

The saint's silent progress from the *cāvaḍī* to the *masjid* following the *kākaḍ ārtī* heightened the solemnity of his *darśan* and functions as a performative teaching, enjoining devotees to cultivate silence and inwardness. Likewise, the fact that Sai Baba offered his *cilīm* to Khaparde "very often" during the midday *ārtī* constitutes a clear indication of special favor.

In the afternoon, the saint is described as being in a "pleased mood", while in the evening he proved unusually communicative. During his customary stroll, he reportedly recounted to Khaparde "nearly the whole previous history of Mrs. Lakshmibai Kaulgi". The diarist was permitted to walk alongside Sai Baba – an uncommon occurrence, as the latter generally walked alone – and was entrusted with this narrative in a manner suggestive of intimate confidence. Given that Khaparde already "knew the facts" concerning Mrs. Kaulgi, this disclosure may be interpreted as a deliberate demonstration of the saint's omniscience (*sarvajña*).

> Shirdi, Friday 26 January 1912
>
> In the morning I got up very early by myself, and miscalculating the time it wanted to sunrise, I said my prayers and walked up and down in the verandah. I found that I was before time by about an hour and a half.
> After sunrise, I began the routine of life here and went out. Then found that Dhonde Baba had arrived from Poona. I naturally sat talking with him. He showed me the latest letter of Tilak. At last the coronation has come and gone without seeing him out of jail. We sat talking about him and Dr. Garde, who has needlessly got up some trouble just now and wishes particularly to harm me.
> We read a little of Paramamrit, *saw Sayin Baba go out and again after he returned.*
> I felt unwell so I lay down for a while.
> Dhonde Baba went away about 4 PM.
> We had our afternoon Ramayan read by Dixit and then *went to see Sayin Baba and walked in front of the Chavadi.*
> At night there was the Wada Arti and Shej Arti, Bhishma's Bhajan and Ramayan of Dixit.
> I received some English letters today.

Khaparde does not record any particular event concerning the saint's words and deeds or his interactions with devotees; the routine of the place appears to have proceeded as usual, with nothing noteworthy to report. By contrast, he expresses satisfaction at meeting his friend and fellow political activist Dhonde Baba, who had come from Pune specifically to see him and to show him the "latest letter" from Tilak, with a view to discussing the political situation and possible courses of action in support of their leader. Khaparde notes with bitterness that "the coronation has come and gone without seeing him out of jail", that is, that the Delhi Coronation Durbar of King-Emperor George V and Queen-Empress Mary – held on 12 December 1911[315] – had not resulted in the hoped-for act of clemency, as Tilak remained imprisoned. The diarist also mentions a certain Dr. Garde, who was allegedly causing trouble and seeking to undermine him politically.

> Shirdi, Saturday 27 January 1912
>
> I got up early in the morning, prayed and attended the Kakad Arti. *Sayin Baba did not quite go to the Masjid without a word and yet he did not say much.*
> I, Upasani, Bhishma and Bapusaheb Jog read Paramamrit, *saw Sayin Saheb go out and again after he returned.*
> The midday Arti passed off easily and after it we had our meals as usual.
> I lay down a while, then wrote a letter, and attended afternoon Ramayan read by Dixit.
> *We saw Sayin Baba at his stroll and he spoke pleasantly though in a serious mood. Towards its end he spoke loud and angry, and I am told that after dark he spoke louder still, making an occasion for the exhibition of his anger of the fact that Ibrahim, the convert, stood near the Khind with his hands on the breach of the wall. Sayin Saheb's clothes were also washed by Radhakrishna Bai and he was angry with her for having done so.*
> Balabhau Joshi went today to Poona to read for the pleaders' examination. He was not present at the Wada Arti.
> After it, Bhishma had his Bhajan in the hall and Dixit read Ramayan there.
> I shall sleep in the verandah. All traces of cold weather are fast disappearing here.

Khaparde records the saint's worsening mood over the course of the day in what may be described as a gradual crescendo. It begins with Sai Baba's sparse speech in the early morning, followed by his speaking "pleasantly though in a serious mood" during his walk, at the conclusion of which he "spoke loud and angry" for no apparent reason. After nightfall, Sai Baba "spoke louder still", manifesting his anger by severely rebuking his attendant Ibrahim for standing near the gate of the *masjid* "with his hands on the breach of the wall". Ibrahim, a recent convert to Islām, had come to Shirdi around 1909 in the company of the *faqīr* Bade Baba. Sai Baba is generally understood to have disapproved of religious conversion, as he consistently advised individuals to adhere to their own religious traditions. It is reported

315 A feature-length film of the event, titled *With Our King and Queen Through India* (also known as *The Durbar in Delhi*), was produced using the early color process Kinemacolor and released on 2 February 1912.

that on one occasion he slapped Ibrahim and admonished him, saying: "You have changed your father".[316]

Sai Baba also displayed anger toward Radhakrishna Bai for having washed his robe (*kafnī*) without seeking his permission. In keeping with his ascetic disposition, he appears to have preferred that his garments not be cleaned frequently, continuing instead to wear his worn and soiled *kafnī*. As on previous occasions, Radhakrishna Bai seems to have acted impulsively, motivated by her intense devotion to the saint.

> Shirdi, Sunday 28 January 1912
>
> I slept very well last night and got up in time to pray before day break and commence the routine of the day.
> I went about 8 AM to the temple of Khandoba where Upasani lives and sat talking with him. It is a nice little place.
> We held our Paramamrit class in the quarters of Bapusaheb Jog, as talking and discussing Vedantic subjects in the verandah of my lodging disturbs my son Balvant.
> *We saw Sayin Maharaj go out and again after he returned to the Masjid. He asked me how we spent the morning and I gave him an account of what we did. He appeared to be in a pleased mood*
> and the midday Arti passed off easily except that Radhakrishna Bai appeared to be put out and vexed and she closed the doors.
> So the Arti things could not be got at soon.
> After the midday meal I lay down for a while, then wrote a letter and attended the Puran of Ramayan by Dixit.
> *Then we went and saw Sayin Maharaj at his evening stroll.*
> Then there was Wada Arti but no Bhajan as Bhishma was unwell.
> At night, Dixit read Ramayan after we returned from Shej Arti.

Khaparde specifies that the morning class on the *Paramāmṛt* of Mukundarāja was held at Bapusaheb Jog's quarters rather than at the *vāḍā*, as was customary. This change of location was necessitated by the fact that "talking and discussing Vedantic subjects in the verandah" would have disturbed his son – an indirect indication that Balvant remained bedridden.

At the morning gathering in the mosque, Sai Baba was in a "pleased mood" and inquired of Khaparde how he and his companions had spent their time. The diarist appears to have provided an account of their activities, likely referring to the chapter of the *Paramāmṛt* they were studying and the religious questions under discussion. Sai Baba was apparently satisfied with his response, although he may have expressed disapproval of Khaparde's having "sat talking" with Upasani at the Khaṇḍobā temple. As noted, this was not the first occasion on which Sai Baba questioned Khaparde about his daily conduct. Such inquiries appear to have served as a reminder to him and to the other devotees of the importance of maintaining focus on their *sādhanā*.

Khaparde further records that during the midday *ārtī* Radhakrishna Bai "appeared to be put out and vexed", which resulted in a delay in the

316 See Shepherd, *Biographical Investigation*, 157; Narasimhaswami, *Charters and Sayings*, 263.

ceremony. It is possible that her irritation stemmed from the fact that Sai Baba had rebuked her the previous day for having washed his garments.

> Shirdi, Monday 29 January 1912
>
> I got up very early in the morning, prayed and found that I was a bit too early but I kept on and attended the Kakad Arti.
> On my return I began the routine of the day.
> About 9 AM I went to Bapusaheb and with him and Upasani began the Paramamrit, but most unaccountably I felt so sleepy that I could make no progress.
> At last I returned to my lodgings and lay down and fell asleep so long that I did not get up till 12:30 or 1 PM. Madhavrao Deshpande and others tried to awaken me for the Arti and called me aloud but I did not respond. At last they went to the Arti and *somehow the matter reached the ears of Sayin Saheb and he said that he would awaken me*. Somehow I got up as the Arti was being finished and attended the closing portion of it. I felt ashamed of having slept so long. I felt drowsy the rest of the day.
> Narayan Rao Vamangaonkar came today from Sholapur. He is a nice young man and I sat talking with him.
> Then in the afternoon I attended the Puran of Dixit and *saw Sayin Saheb at his evening stroll. I had seen him when he went out between 9 and 10 AM*.
> In the evening there was the Bhajan of Bhishma and afterwards the Puran of Dixit. He read Ramayan as usual.

Khaparde rose earlier than usual, and this appears to have left him so fatigued that, by mid-morning, he was compelled to return to his lodgings. Although Madhavrao Deshpande and other devotees repeatedly attempted to rouse him in time for the midday *ārtī*, he "did not respond" and continued to sleep. Sai Baba is said to have been aware of the situation and instructed the other *bhakta*s present in the *masjid* not to be concerned, assuring them that he himself would awaken Khaparde. In due course, Khaparde did awaken and was able to reach the mosque in time to attend "the closing portion" of the *ārtī*. The diary entry centers on this delay, of which he "felt ashamed"; Khaparde also notes that he remained "drowsy the rest of the day".

This was not the first occasion on which Khaparde fell asleep and failed to adhere to the established routine. The episode suggests a temporary lapse in discipline on his part – one that he himself readily acknowledged. Sai Baba expected his devotees to observe the daily schedule with rigor, organizing their activities so as to be punctual for prayers, *darśan*s, *darbār*s, *ārtī*s, and related observances. Such punctuality formed an integral component of their *sādhanā*, and he required that it be maintained with the utmost care. Only Sai Baba himself, for reasons known to him alone, could modify the program. On this occasion, however, the saint appears to have been indulgent toward Khaparde and did not reprimand him. This leniency may be explained by the diarist's otherwise consistent attendance at the *kākaḍ ārtī*, the *Paramāmṛt* class, and the saint's *darśan* during his morning outing between 9 and 10 AM. Nevertheless, the incident highlights a shortcoming that Khaparde himself recognized as requiring correction.



Figure 41 Sai Baba inside the mosque wearing a garland. This photograph was taken by Govind Dhondo Pansare in 1913

> Shirdi, Tuesday 30 January 1912
>
> I got up early but did not like to leave bed and begin work for fear of becoming again overcome by sleep as I was yesterday. I left bed before day break, finished my prayers and went to Bapusaheb Jog for our Paramamrit class. Upasani Shastri, Mrs. Kaulgi and Bapusaheb were there and we made very good progress.
> *We saw Sayin Baba go out and saw him again after he returned to the Masjid. He asked me how I spent the morning and I gave him an account of what we did.*
> After the midday Arti I returned [to the *vāḍā*] and we had our meal. After it, I sat reading the dailies and then wrote a few letters.
> Later on, Mr. Dixit read Ramayan. Bhishma and Madhavrao Deshpande attended the reading. Some two men of this village and the younger brother of Sitaram Dengle also came and sat talking after the reading was finished. One of them recited a Chhanda[317] on Ramayan.
> *Then I went to see Sayin Baba at the Masjid and he again asked me how I spent the afternoon*. When I mentioned my writing letters, *he smiled and said, "It is better moving your hands than sitting idle"*.
> *We saw him have his evening stroll*, and at night attended the Shej Arti.
> There was no Bhajan tonight but reading of Bhagavat took up all its time, and Dixit read Ramayan at night.

On both 15 and 28 January, the *faqīr* had asked the diarist how he had spent the morning, to which Khaparde provided an account of his activities. On the present occasion, he must have responded by stating that he had engaged in prayer and, together with Bapusaheb Jog, Upasani, and Mrs. Kaulgi, had made "very good progress" in their *Paramāmṛt* class. The fact that Sai Baba also inquired about how he had spent the afternoon indicates his concern that his devotees remain actively engaged in spiritual practice, rather than allowing their minds to dwell on worldly matters. When Khaparde informed him that he had written a few letters – as he had likewise done on 15 January – the *faqīr* "smiled", suggesting a degree of indulgence, and remarked that moving one's hands was preferable to "sitting idle", idleness and sloth – manifestations of *tamas* – being regarded as serious obstacles to one's *sādhanā*. As Sai Baba is reported to have told another devotee, Sagun Meru Naik: "One must do some work and not sit idle".[318] In this regard, one is reminded of Kṛṣṇa's teaching to Arjuna in *Bhagavadgītā* 3.22-24, where he presents himself as a model for all beings:

> For Me, son of Pṛthā, there is nothing to be done
> In the three worlds whatsoever,
> Nothing unattained to be attained;
> And yet I still continue in action.
> For if I did not continue
> At all in action, unwearied,
> My path (would) follow

317 A metrical composition (*chandas*), i.e., a verse form governed by specific prosodic rules.

318 Chitluri, *Baba's Vaani*, 126. See also Narasimhaswami, *Charters and Sayings*, 107.

Men altogether, son of Pṛthā.
These folk would perish
If I did not perform action,
And I should be an agent of confusion;
I should destroy these creatures.[319]

Shirdi, Wednesday 31 January 1912

I got up in time for Kakad Arti and went to it with Narayanarao Vamangaonkar. *Sayin Maharaj exhibited slightly angry feelings as we returned* [*from the ārtī*].
We held our Paramamrit class with Bapusaheb Jog, Upasani Shastri and Mrs. Kaulgi and finished a good deal.
I returned to my lodging about 11 AM and tried to write a few letters but most unaccountably fell asleep in the act of writing. Bhau, son of Dada Kelkar, woke me up and I went to the Masjid for midday Arti. *I had previously seen Sayin Maharaj go out as usual*. The midday Arti passed off as usual.
All the inmates of the two Wadas together with a few others were invited to the afternoon meal by Dada Kelkar in memory of the 13th day of Megha's death.[320] The meal was naturally very late and I lay down and slept sound till I was called to it.
It was finished about 5 PM and *then I went to the Masjid and sat near Sayin Saheb. He was in a very pleased mood, talked pleasantly, danced and sang, and reminded me and others very strongly of what Lord Krishna did in Gokul. We saw him at his evening stroll.*
After the Wada Arti, Bhishma did a little Bhajan and Kaka Dixit read Ramayan. He finished Sundara Kand of it tonight.

Khaparde records that, soon after the *kākaḍ ārtī*, Sai Baba "exhibited slightly angry feelings" for reasons known only to himself, thereby illustrating the saint's unpredictability. He further notes that, "most unaccountably", he was again overcome by sleep when, at 11 AM, he attempted to write a few letters. On this occasion, however, Dada Kelkar's son succeeded in waking him in time for the midday *ārtī*. Thereafter, he once more "lay down and slept soundly" until he was called to participate in the afternoon meal. Evidently, the diarist was still in need of rest.

Seated "near Sayin Saheb" in the *masjid*, Khaparde enjoyed the privilege of observing Sai Baba at close quarters. On this occasion, the *faqīr* was in a jovial mood, and it is noteworthy that he not only "talked pleasantly" but also "danced and sang", moving with an agility unexpected in a man of his venerable appearance. The sources indicate that in his youth – and at least until around 1890 – Sai Baba used to sing devotional hymns, "mostly in Persian or Arabic [...] sometimes [also] the more popular songs of Kabir",[321] and that he delighted in dancing in a state of ecstatic absorption, especially

319 Edgerton, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, 20.

320 The customary period of mourning concludes on the thirteenth day after death.

321 Bharadwaja, *Sai Baba the Master*, 25. See also Narasimhaswami, *Life of Sai Baba*, 1: 19-20.

at night: "He tied tinklets (*Gunguru*) to his ankles and danced about in joy while singing his songs with rapt devotion".[322] This practice may plausibly be related to the Sufi ritual of *samā*, which is intended to induce states of mystical absorption.

Khaparde and other devotees reportedly felt "very strongly reminded of what Lord Krishna did in Gokul", that is, they associated the *faqīr*'s singing and dancing with Kṛṣṇa's *rāslīlā* (lit. 'dance pastime') with the cowherd maidens (*gopīs*), as described in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (10.33). Such an interpretation is unsurprising, given their Hindu background.[323] For his part, however, Sai Baba appears not to have drawn any distinction between *samā* and *rāslīlā*, or between Allāh and Kṛṣṇa. What mattered to him was the purity of the devotee's heart and the intensity of their love for God, beyond names, forms, and the doctrinal boundaries of institutionalized religions. Through singing and dancing, he enacted a direct relationship with the supreme Lord (*mālik*), without recourse to intermediaries.

> Shirdi, Thursday 1 February 1912
>
> I was somewhat late in getting up but was able to finish my prayers and in time to attend Paramamrit class. The book was finished today and we shall begin to revise it tomorrow.
> I then went to the Masjid, *sat with Sayin Maharaj and accompanied him out up to Sathe's Wada. People assembled there as usual to salute him. I joined their group, saluted him* and returning to Bapusaheb Jog's quarters commenced Panchadashi and explained the first ten verses which really contain the whole work in germinal form.
> Then I returned to my quarters, wrote a few letters and had them sent off, and went to the Masjid to attend the midday Arti. It passed off alright. Mr. Manikchand of Ahmednagar who has this year taken the degree of L.L.B. came there and stayed here the whole day.
> We had our meals after we returned from the Arti and I sat reading Jnaneshwari edited by Sakhre Bua.[324] Unfortunately, like the other editions, it does not solve all my difficulties.
> Later on Mr. Dixit read Ramayan.
> Mr. Sane, Mamlatdar of Shirdi, and Mr. Sathe, Deputy Collector and Sub-divisional officer, came and sat talking for sometime. We resumed our Ramayan after they went and in the evening went to the Masjid *to meet Sayin Baba at his evening stroll*.
> After the Wada Arti we attended the Shej Arti.
> Bhishma did not have his Bhajan but read Sakharam's Prakrit Bhagavat[325] and at night Mr. Dixit read Ramayan.
> Today evening when we assembled at the Masjid *before Sayin*

322 Bharadwaja, *Sai Baba the Master*, 20. In a footnote, Narasimhaswami notes that "G.G. Narke also adds that Baba would do so [= skip and dance] in G.G. Narke's mother's presence"; Narasimhaswami, *Life of Sai Baba*, 1: 20 fn.

323 On the purported similarity between Sai Baba's dance and that of Kṛṣṇa, see Chitluri, *Baba's Vaani*, 104-5.

324 The *Jñāneśvarī*, edited by Nana Maharaj Sakhare. Sakhare (d. 1903) was an eminent religious scholar; see "Nana Maharaj Sakhare", https://map.sahapedia.org/article/Nana-Maharaj-Sakhare/2497.

325 The *Eknāthī Bhagavat* owned by Sakharam Hari (Bapusaheb Jog).

> *Baba started on his stroll, Sayin Saheb told Mr. Dixit to give two hundred rupees to my wife who was there shampooing the legs of Sayin Saheb.* This order was unaccountable. Has it come to this that I have to be maintained by charity!!! I prefer death to this. Sayin Saheb I think wished to curb and finally destroy my pride, so he is getting me used to poverty and the charity of others.

Khaparde records that, although he was "somewhat late in getting up", he nevertheless enjoyed the privilege of sitting near Sai Baba in the mosque in the morning and of accompanying him as far as Sathe *vāḍā*, where devotees had assembled to pay their respects – further evidence of his close association with the saint.

Particularly noteworthy is the episode at Bapusaheb Jog's residence, where Khaparde "explained the first ten verses" of Vidyāraṇya's *Pañcadaśī*, observing that these verses "contain the whole work in germinal form". This remark attests to his deep grounding in Vedāntic philosophy. He further notes that in the early afternoon he read Jñāndev's *Jñāneśvarī*; however, neither Sakhare's edition nor others available to him fully resolved the interpretative and textual difficulties he encountered.[326]

In the evening, Khaparde's wife was granted the privilege of massaging the saint's legs, a gesture understood as a reward for her profound devotion. What struck the diarist most forcefully, however, was that the *faqīr* instructed Mr. Dixit to give her two hundred rupees. Khaparde interpreted this as a means to "curb and ultimately destroy" his pride. For the first time in his diary, he resorted to three exclamation marks: "Has it come to this that I have to be maintained by charity!!!" – a vivid indication of the depth of his wounded self-respect. At the time, he and his family were indeed experiencing financial hardship. For Khaparde's wife, Lakshmibai, accustomed to a life of comfort and abundance, this constituted a particularly severe trial.

In 1924-25, when Khaparde authorized the publication of his diary in the periodical *Shri Sai Leela*, he appended an explanatory note to this entry:

> I turned up the diary for 1st February, 1912, and read the passage indicated by you. It correctly represents my feelings. Our Sadguru Sayin Maharaj gave the order. Being omniscient, he knew everything including all my innermost thoughts and never insisted on the order being carried out. Now that my attention has been drawn to the matter it appears to me that my wife then did not like the life of labor and poverty. Kaka Saheb Dixit had accepted the life and was happy. So Sayin Maharaj asked him to give two hundred rupees i.e. poverty and patience to my life.[327]

Khaparde emphasizes that Sai Baba's instruction was never implemented: Dixit did not, in fact, give the sum to Khaparde's wife. Given the considerable value of two hundred rupees in 1912, such a transaction would have entailed significant humiliation. It is therefore noteworthy that Khaparde interprets

326 For a reliable English translation of the *Jñāneśvarī*, the celebrated Marāṭhī commentary on the *Bhagavadgītā*, see Swami Kripananda, *Jnaneshwar's Gita*.

327 *Shirdi Diary of the Hon'ble Mr. G.S. Khaparde*, 72. See also Kher, "Shirdi Diary and Mrs. Khaparde", 133-8. The final word 'life' appears to be a misspelling of 'wife'.

the *faqīr*'s statement symbolically. For him, the number 'two' signifies poverty and patience, even though Sai Baba more commonly associated it with the twin virtues of faith (*niṣṭhā*) and patience (*saburī*). Nevertheless, Khaparde's interpretation is persuasive: the example of Dixit – who had joyfully embraced a life of austerity at his *guru*'s feet – was intended as a moral lesson for both Khaparde and his wife.

It is worth emphasizing that Sai Baba held Mrs. Khaparde in high regard. Her devotion was such that she would not partake of food until her offering had been accepted by the *faqīr*. The *Shri Sai Satcharita* (chap. 27, vv. 159-67) recounts the following episode:

> Baba said, "O Shyama! How can I describe the rarity of this food-offering? In a previous birth, this lady was a well-fed cow of a grocer, yielding abundant milk. She then disappeared somewhere and took birth in the house of a gardener. Later she was born a *Kshatriya* (the warrior race) and was then married to a grocer. After that she was born in a Brahmin household. I saw her after a long time. Let me eat in peace and happiness two morsels offered to me with so much love!" So saying, he ate to his heart's content, washed his hands and mouth, expressing his satiety most naturally through belching. Then he came and sat on his seat. The lady then made obeisance and began pressing his feet. Taking this opportunity, Baba spoke to her lovingly of things of her own interest. With his own hands, Baba gently pressed her hands that were pressing his feet. Seeing this mutual loving service of God and his devotee, Shyama then began to tease, saying – "Well, well, Baba! Very fine! What an interesting sight! Seeing this reciprocal feeling we are amazed!" Baba was pleased at heart to see her devoted service and said to her softly, "Keep on saying 'Rajaram', 'Rajaram'. Say this all the time and O Mother! your life will be fulfilled, your mind will be at peace and you will benefit immensely".[328]

Sai Baba's account of Mrs. Khaparde's successive rebirths is consistent with a broader pattern in his teachings, wherein he recounts the previous lives of devotees. Her trajectory is presented as one of progressive spiritual ascent: from a well-nourished cow – symbolically pure and life-sustaining – to successive human births across increasingly elevated social strata, culminating in a Brahmin household. Particularly striking is the continuity posited between animal and human existence, conceived as part of a natural evolutionary progression.

Underlying this narrative is the doctrinal premise that, although a person's knowledge and material acquisitions are lost at death, their *vāsanā*s and *saṃskāra*s – that is, their latent tendencies and affective dispositions – persist and shape future rebirths. Yearnings directed toward the divine, characterized by selfless love and devotion, lead to higher births and ultimately to liberation from *saṃsāra*. Conversely, attachment to worldly pursuits perpetuates one's entanglement in the cycle of transmigration.

This episode also constitutes a rare instance of Sai Baba explicitly advising a devotee to engage in *mantra*-like repetition. Although he himself,

328 Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 446-7. See also Satpathy, *An Inspiring Life*, 201. For a biographical sketch of Mrs. Lakshmibai Khaparde, see Kher, "Shirdi Diary and Mrs. Khaparde", 126-41; Chitluri, "Sai Baba's Mahabhaktas: Lakshmi Bai Khaparde", `https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z5UBJUqQtrM`.

like his *guru*, did not formally initiate disciples by imparting *mantra*s, he is said to have longed in his youth to receive one from his own master. In the *Shri Sai Satcharita* (chap. 19, v. 48) we read: "I too, had a strong desire to give up his refuge and to receive from his own mouth a *mantra* even if it meant a prolonged effort".[329] His exhortation to Mrs. Khaparde to repeat "Rājarām" ('King Rām') should therefore not be construed as a formal initiation, but rather as an encouragement to continue her practice of *nāmasmaraṇa* – the devotional repetition of the divine name – directed toward her chosen deity, Rām.[330]

> Shirdi, Friday 2 February 1912
>
> I got up for the Kakad Arti, and after it we held our Paramamrit class but somehow fell to speak of Panchadashi and commenced to read it. It is about the best work on the subject and none can take precedence of it.
> *I went to see Sayin Maharaj before he went out and accompanied him up to Sathe's Wada* and afterwards attended the midday Arti.
> Today I got a letter from Amravati asking me to return to practice. I told Madhavrao Deshpande to ask Sayin Maharaj and he promised to do so.
> After the midday meal I lay down for a while.
> Then Mr. Dixit read Ramayan and later on *we went to see Sayin Baba go out for a stroll*.
> We returned [to the *vāḍā*] soon after it and at night there was Bhishma's Bhajan and Dixit's Ramayan.

Although the participants in the morning class were originally expected to discuss the *Paramāmṛt*, Khaparde and the others instead began reading the *Pañcadaśī*. Given the diarist's acknowledged expertise in this text – which he himself extols as "the best work" on Vedānta – it is reasonable to infer that he assumed a leading role in the session. On the same day, he notes that he was again granted the privilege of accompanying Sai Baba as far as the Sathe *vāḍā*, thereby affording him an opportunity to exchange a few words with the saint along the way.

Khaparde requested Madhavrao Deshpande to intercede on his behalf with Sai Baba for permission to return home, having "got a letter from Amravati asking him to return to practice". By this time, he appears largely resigned to remaining in Shirdi; nevertheless, he made one further attempt. As noted, Madhavrao Deshpande enjoyed exceptional proximity to Sai Baba.[331] The *Shri Sai Satcharita* records: "Those who wished to have a quiet, undisturbed conversation with Baba, would always take Madhavrao with them, initially. He would then introduce the topic in soft sweet tones as to who had come, from where and for what purpose. On this introduction, Samarth [= Sai Baba] would then be induced to converse".[332] It further

329 Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 303.

330 See Satpathy, *An Inspiring Life*, 152-3.

331 Sai Baba once told Gopalrao Mukund Buti: "Keep Madhav Rao with you. It is as good as keeping Me with you". Buti therefore summoned him to his deathbed and breathed his last at Shyama's feet; see Chitluri, *Baba's Rinanubandh*, 77.

332 Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 173 (chap. 11, vv. 87-8).

observes: "It was he whom Baba liked better than anybody else; whose love for Baba defied comparison with anyone else's and whose authority too, was very great. […] For Madhavrao, Baba had an extraordinary affection – as if he was his own child".[333] Sai Baba is also said to have remarked that their association extended across seventy-two generations.[334]

Madhavrao Deshpande's intimacy with the saint was such that he occasionally took remarkable liberties with him. Addressing a woman to whom the *faqīr* had promised a child within twelve months, he declared:

> If you do not deliver a child before the twelfth month from today is over, just listen to what I will do! If I do not bang the coconut in the same way on his head and send away this God from this mosque, I will give up my name, Madhav! I will surely not allow such a God to remain in the mosque and you will get the proof at the right time. Know, that this is my firm resolve![335]

Madhavrao was widely believed to possess the ability to interpret Sai Baba's often allusive speech and enigmatic actions. Khaparde held him in high esteem for his unwavering devotion and his constant remembrance of the saint, even during sleep, as he himself had observed on 8 December 1911.

> Shirdi, Saturday 3 February 1912
>
> I was late in getting up and it appeared that there was a wave of laziness. Bapusaheb Jog was late, so was Mr. Dixit and nearly everybody else.
> After finishing my prayers, I went to the Masjid but *Sayin Baba told me to take Udi without entering it*. I did so, and proceeding to the quarters of Bapusaheb Jog sat reading Panchadashi with him, Upasani and Mrs. Kaulgi. We went on reading till midday and then *went to Sayin Baba's Arti*. After it we had our midday meal. I had a little rest and then sat reading Dasbodh.[336]
> Mr. Dixit read Ramayan in the afternoon. Ganoba Aba, a local devotee of Sayin Baba, came to hear it. He knows a large number of verses and has many by heart.
> *We went and saw Sayin Baba at his stroll.*
> Madhavrao Deshpande told me that he asked Sayin Baba about my returning to Amravati, and *the latter declined the necessary permission saying he was an old man and did not like to lose his "Abru"*. ***He said that some two hundred men went to a neighboring town and were taken up as rioters; that Madhavrao's name was introduced into the list of rioters for nothing, and that there was trouble about it.***
> At night there was the Wada Arti and the Shej Arti and I attended both.
> Bhishma had no Bhajan but read Bhagavat instead and then there was Ramayan of Dixit.

333 Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 492 (chap. 30, vv. 51, 53).

334 See Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 600 (chap. 36, v. 140).

335 Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 601-2 (chap. 36, vv. 156-8).

336 Lit. 'The Instruction of the Servant'. It is the *magnum opus* of the Marāṭhī poet-saint Rāmdās (1608-1681), a voluminous treatise comprising over 7,700 verses.

The diarist notes that a "wave of laziness" prevailed in the early morning, as no one adhered to the established schedule. Sai Baba's apparent coldness toward Khaparde – directing him merely to take the *udī* without entering the mosque – may be connected to the latter's persistent and, perhaps, importunate requests for permission to leave Shirdi.

When approached once again through Madhavrao Deshpande, the *faqīr* refused, remarking that he was an "old man" who did not wish to lose his "*abrū*", that is, his honor or reputation. This statement may be interpreted to mean that, having repeatedly assured the diarist of his protection from all misfortune, Sai Baba required Khaparde to remain patiently in Shirdi in order for that assurance to hold. To depart prematurely would expose him to the risk of arrest; should any harm befall him, it would, in effect, compromise the *faqīr*'s reputation by suggesting a failure to safeguard his devotee.

The brief narrative that Sai Baba recounts to Madhavrao Deshpande can be read in this light. According to this interpretation, a large group – "some two hundred men" – falls into trouble the moment it leaves its native village, that is, Shirdi, which functions as a place of refuge for devotees, their true spiritual home.

Upon reaching a "neighboring town", they are mistaken for "rioters" and consequently arrested. This episode may be understood as a symbolic allusion to the fate that might await Khaparde and his associates were they to leave Shirdi.

Furthermore, the *faqīr* cautions Madhavrao Deshpande that his own name appears among those of the alleged rioters, despite his lack of involvement. This detail may be read as reflecting the suspicion arising from his close association with Khaparde and his readiness to intercede on his behalf, thereby rendering him liable to be perceived as an accomplice. In effect, Sai Baba appears to advise Shyama to refrain from intervening and to allow events to unfold according to his design.

Finally, the diarist's observation that "a local devotee", Ganoba Aba, knew many verses of the *Rāmāyaṇa* "by heart" is noteworthy, as it attests to the deep cultural and devotional embeddedness of this epic even among ordinary villagers.



Figure 42 Sai Baba inside the renovated mosque

Shirdi, Sunday 4 February 1912

In the morning I got up early, attended the Kakad Arti and then finished my prayer.
As I was bathing, two gentlemen came enquiring about Narayan Rao Vamangaonkar. They were Lingayat Shastris.[337] The eldest being known as Shivanand Shastri. There are two ladies with them. These ladies are Brahmins. The eldest of them is called Brahmanand Bai. Some three years ago, she met a Lingayat lady by name Nijanand Bai at Nasik. She was an advanced yogini and instructed Brahmanand Bai.
We all saw Sayin Maharaj go out and again after he returned to the Masjid. Brahmanand Bai worshipped him and sang two Artis very exquisitely.
After the midday Arti I had my meal and lay down for a while.
Then there was the Puran of Mr. Dixit and then *we went to see Sayin Baba at his evening stroll.*
After the Wada Arti at night, Mr. Dixit had his Puran and then Bhishma had his Bhajan. The ladies Brahmanand Bai and her companion sang very beautifully and we all enjoyed the Bhajan very much. Shivanand Shastri also sang. The Shastris and the ladies come from Nasik. They are permanent inhabitants of the place.

Khaparde's remark that Sai Baba permitted Brahmanand Bai – a Liṅgāyat woman from the town of Nasik, an important pilgrimage center – to worship him in the mosque and to sing two *ārtī*s "very exquisitely" in his honor constitutes further evidence of the saint's tolerance and integrative spirituality. It is evident that he was pleased by her heartfelt devotion. The diarist's additional observation that she had received instruction from an "advanced *yoginī*" suggests that she was a committed spiritual aspirant.

On this day, the diarist does not record any specific utterance or action of Sai Baba. It may be conjectured either that the saint maintained a certain distance from Khaparde, as on the previous day, or that he was in one of his characteristically taciturn moods.

Shirdi, Monday 5 February 1912

In the morning, just as I finished my prayers, Rajarampant Dixit came from Nagpur. He is the elder brother of Kakasaheb Dixit. *He went to see Sayin Saheb.*
I attended our class where we read Panchadashi and a verse of Amritanubhav[338] with Bapusaheb Jog, Upasani Shastri, Shivanand Shastri, Brahmanand Bai and others.
We saw Sayin Saheb go out and went to the Masjid after he returned. He was very kind to me, said a few words, and in dismissing the company after Arti, called me by name, told me to shake off my sloth, and look after all the ladies and children.
Mrs. Lakshmibai Kaulgi was given today a piece of bread and

337 Scholars of the South Indian Liṅgāyat community.

338 Lit. 'The Experience of Nectar/Immortality', a versified philosophical work inspired by Vedānta, composed by the Marāṭhī poet-saint Jñāndev, which expounds the oneness of the individual soul (*jīva*) and the supreme Śiva.

> *told to go and eat with Radhakrishna Bai. This is a great good fortune. She will be happy hereafter.*
> I invited Shivanand Shastri, Brahmanand Bai and all with them to have their midday meal with us. After it I lay down for a few minutes.
> Then Dixit read Ramayan, and later *we went to see Sayin Maharaj at his stroll.*
> After the Wada Arti there was the Shej Arti and at night Brahmanand Bai did the Bhajan very excellently. It was continued till after midnight.
> *The subject of my going is broached today.* It may be decided tomorrow.

In the morning, Sai Baba held his customary gathering with the devotees at the mosque, and on this occasion he once again displayed his benevolence toward Khaparde, to whom he was "very kind" and spoke "a few words". It is noteworthy that, "in dismissing the company after the *ārtī*", he called Khaparde by name – thereby underscoring their intimacy – and exhorted him to "shake off" his sloth and to "look after all the ladies and children" of his own family as well as those of his friends and fellow devotees. Preoccupied with his own concerns and personal difficulties, Khaparde had evidently been neglecting his responsibilities. Sai Baba's admonition thus called him to attend to the needs of those around him and to serve them with care and compassion. In doing so, the saint emphasized the primacy of selfless service and the cultivation of a spirit of fellowship: the divine is to be recognized in all beings, especially in the most vulnerable and needy. In response to this instruction, Khaparde notes that he "invited Shivanand Shastri, Brahmanand Bai and all with them to have their midday meal" at his residence.

The diarist further records the "great good fortune" of Mrs. Lakshmibai Kaulgi, to whom Sai Baba gave a "piece of bread" as *prasād*, instructing her to share it with Radhakrishna Bai. The assertion that she "will be happy hereafter" reflects the profound spiritual significance that Khaparde attributed to the saint's *prasād*. It should be recalled that Sai Baba regularly sent food to Radhakrishna Bai, a practice that attests to the high regard in which he held her.

In conclusion, Khaparde returns to the matter that continually preoccupied him – namely, the desire to obtain Sai Baba's permission to return home. He notes that, since the issue had been "broached" on that day, it might perhaps "be decided tomorrow", a remark that reveals the persistence of his hope.

> Shirdi, Tuesday 6 February 1912
>
> I got up and attended the Kakad Arti.
> Madhavrao Deshpande said that I would get permission to return home today. *So I went with him and Vamangaonkar to Sayin Saheb at about 7:30 AM and Sayin Saheb told us to come again in the afternoon.*
> So we returned [to the *vāḍā*] and I began the routine of the day.
> I, Upasani and Bapusaheb Jog read Panchadashi, *saw Sayin Maharaj go out* and attended the midday Arti. Brahmanand Bai sang an Arti and a few Padas[339] there.
> Bapusaheb Jog went today to Kopargaon to get his pension so

339 Versified compositions in praise of God.

the Arti was finished soon.
After the midday meal, I and Vamangaonkar went to the Masjid. Kakasaheb Dixit was there. *Sayin Saheb said that we might go tomorrow.* Madhavrao Deshpande also came there. *Sayin Saheb said that he had been considering long and thinking day and night. All were thieves, but we had to deal with them. He said he prayed to* God *night and day for their improvement or removal, but* God *delays and apparently does not approve of the attitude and grant the prayer. He will wait for a month or two and then see; but whether living or dead he will have what he has been praying for. He will not go to Teli or Wani* [= grocer]*, and never beg of them. People are not good and devoted. They are unsettled in mind and so on. He added that a few friends would gather together, talk divine wisdom, and sit and contemplate. He mentioned a few thousand rupees but I do not remember in what connection he said it.*
I then returned and we had the Ramayan Puran by Dixit.
Later on *we went to see him come out for his stroll. He was in a pleased mood.*
Mr. Rajarampant Dixit went away today to Khandwa.
Upasani Shastri lost his wife. The sad news came by letter. I, Dixit and Madhavrao went to Upasani, condoled with him and brought him to the Wada.
Fakir Baba appears to have asked about my going away and *Sayin Baba answered that I told him that I would go tomorrow.* When my wife spoke about my going, *Sayin Baba said that I did not ask for permission personally, so he would not say.* I happened to go there soon after, and *Sayin Baba said that I could not go away without taking five hundred rupees from Dada Bhat*[340] *and two hundred from someone else and making them all over to him.*
At night the Wada Arti was a bit late as Bapusaheb Jog had to return from Kopargaon.
Brahmanand Bai and Shivanand Shastri did Bhajan. So did Bhishma.

Sai Baba appears both to tease and to rebuke Khaparde, thereby testing his endurance. In the early morning, he postpones the question of Khaparde's departure from Shirdi until the afternoon. Later, in the early afternoon, he initially informs him that he may leave the following day – thus confirming what Madhavrao Deshpande had anticipated, the latter having evidently discerned certain hints from the *faqīr*. Subsequently, however, when Khaparde's wife inquires explicitly about the matter, Sai Baba replies that "he would not say", on the grounds that her husband had not personally requested permission but had instead relied on intermediaries. This response clearly constitutes a rebuke, pointing to Khaparde's reluctance to confront the saint directly.

Moreover, when Fakir Baba (i.e., Bade Baba) inquires about Khaparde's departure, Sai Baba remarks that Khaparde had told him he would leave the following day, thereby implying that he had already resolved to depart without formally seeking authorization. As is well known, such conduct was deemed improper, since a devotee's departure from Shirdi required the

340 'Bhat' is derived from the Sanskrit *bhaṭṭa*, a title of respect meaning 'scholar' or 'learned person'; here it refers to Dada Kelkar. The term is also a common surname among Maharashtrian Brahmins. It is reported that Sai Baba gave him five rupees daily; see Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 473 (chap. 29, v. 29).

explicit sanction of the saint; sources consistently report that those who disregarded his will and left prematurely encountered various difficulties.[341] In this way, the *faqīr* exposes Khaparde's unspoken intentions and places him in a position of embarrassment.

Upon arriving at the mosque shortly after Sai Baba had spoken with his wife, Khaparde is informed that he "could not go away" without first collecting a total of seven hundred rupees (five hundred plus two hundred) from two other devotees – Dada Kelkar and another individual – and offering the sum as *dakṣiṇā*. Such a demand would have been deeply uncomfortable for the diarist, given his sense of pride. The numerical symbolism – 5(00) + 2(00) – may be interpreted as signifying that Khaparde would not be permitted to leave Shirdi until he had, in effect, learned from these devotees how to master the five senses (*indriya*s) and to cultivate the twin virtues of faith and patience (*niṣṭhā–saburī*), thereby surrendering himself completely to the saint.[342]

Sai Baba's discourse reiterates several recurrent themes and presents a somber view of human nature. He observes that "all are thieves", though he must nevertheless deal with them; that he "will not go to Teli or Wani, and never beg of them"; and that people are generally "not good and devoted", being "unsettled in mind". At the same time, he emphasizes that he has long been reflecting and praying to Allāh "night and day" for either the reformation or the removal of these "thieves". Although Allāh appears to delay and does not immediately grant his prayer, Sai Baba affirms with determination that, "living or dead", he will obtain what he seeks.

These statements bear directly upon Khaparde's own situation: the "thieves" may be understood as those hostile forces seeking to arrest and prosecute him. While Allāh delays in answering the saint's prayer for their removal or transformation, Sai Baba underscores his unwavering resolve. Significantly, he remarks that he "will wait for a month or two and then see", thereby suggesting that Khaparde would be required to remain in Shirdi for at least that period, since conditions were not yet favorable for his departure – a point that Sai Baba would articulate explicitly on 23 February. In fact, the diarist was compelled to remain in Shirdi until mid-March.

The statement that "a few friends would gather together, talk divine wisdom, and sit and contemplate" may be read as an assurance of a positive resolution. Despite present adversities, Khaparde and a select group of devotees will ultimately come together, engage in spiritual discourse, and attain a state of contemplative communion with their revered master. Sai Baba also mentioned "a few thousand rupees", though Khaparde could not recall the context in which this substantial sum was invoked.

Finally, the diarist records the sorrowful news of the death of Upasani Shastri's wife. In fact, she was his third wife, his two previous spouses having also predeceased him. Narasimhaswami recounts the episode as follows:

> When Upasani Maharaj's wife died about the end of January 1912, Upasani M. came much perturbed to Baba and said, "Here is Rs. 10/-. Please do

341 See Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 132-5 (chap. 9, vv. 5-38), 538 (chap. 33, vv. 70-3), 582 (chap. 35, vv. 151-2). See also Chitluri, *Baba's Rinanubandh*, 5.

342 See Rigopoulos, *Life and Teachings*, 147. On the symbolism of the number five, see Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 254-5 (chap. 16, vv. 54-73).

something to give Sadgati [= liberation] to my wife". Baba: "Keep the money. She (her spirit) has already come to me. What has to be taken from you has already been taken".[343]

> Shirdi, Wednesday 7 February 1912
>
> I got up early, prayed and held our Panchadashi class as usual. I did not go to Sayin Maharaj to ask for permission. *We saw him go out and I went to the Masjid after he returned. I found that Sayin Maharaj was sitting* and in the yard a man was exhibiting tricks taught by him to a monkey. There was also a professional singer and dancer. She had a good voice and gave religious songs.
> Later on came Brahmanand Bai, her companion Salubai and Shivanand Shastri. *They did the Puja* and Brahmanand Bai whom they call Mayisaheb[344] sang very beautifully. *Sayin Saheb ordered the Sinhasan* [= lit. 'lion's seat', a throne] *etc. to be brought* and when all was arranged we stood at our posts. Mayisaheb again rendered two songs so excellently that we stood spellbound. I think Sayin Saheb liked them. Then we did the usual Arti and returned for our midday meal. Mayisaheb and her people fed at my lodgings.
> After the meal, Vamangaonkar and Mayisaheb with all her people *went to Sayin Saheb to ask for permission to return*. Mayisaheb and Salubai *got the permission* and went away by cart. Shivanand Shastri and Vamangaonkar *were detained by Sayin Maharaj* and stayed.
> I lay down and had a good nap.
> Then Mr. Dixit read Ramayan and after it I read Dasbodh by myself.
> *We all saw Sayin Saheb have his evening stroll*, and after the Wada Arti we attended the Shej Arti.
> At night, Bhishma read Bhagavat and Mr. Dixit read Ramayan.

In light of what the saint had told him the previous day, Khaparde understandably did not venture to approach him again to request permission to leave Shirdi; rather, he resigned himself to remaining and entrusted the matter entirely to Sai Baba.

The presence in the village of a man performing tricks with his monkey, as well as of a professional singer and dancer, constitutes further evidence of the saint's growing renown. By this time, it had become customary for musicians, performers, and other talented individuals to present themselves at the *faqīr*'s *darbār*. The *Shri Sai Satcharita* records that in 1916 a group of devotional singers came to Shirdi, drawn by Sai Baba's fame and generosity. It is also reported that *pahud*s and *bhavayya*s – that is, village entertainers such as buffoons, acrobats, jugglers, and snake charmers – frequently visited Shirdi, attracted by accounts of the saint's kindness toward pilgrims and his distribution of money.[345]

343 Narasimhaswami, *Charters and Sayings*, 142.

344 Lit. 'respected mother' (*māī*).

345 See Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 471 (chap. 29, vv. 1-7). For the saint's fame and power of attraction, see also *ibid.*, 525-6 (chap. 32, vv. 113-20).

Once again, Sai Baba permitted Brahmanand Bai and her group to perform *pūjā* in the mosque, and she sang for him with remarkable skill. The fact that, on this occasion, he ordered his richly adorned *siṅhāsan* and other regal paraphernalia to be brought out constitutes a striking exception to his otherwise ascetic, *faqīr*-like mode of life. As previously noted, Sai Baba had a deep appreciation for music and must have been greatly moved by Brahmanand Bai's devotion and melodious voice.

As he had done on 5 February, Khaparde displayed notable hospitality by inviting Brahmanand Bai and her companions to partake of a meal at his lodging, thereby putting into practice the saint's injunction to "look after all the ladies and children". After the meal, the *faqīr* permitted Brahmanand Bai and her companion Salubai to depart, whereas Shivanand Shastri and Vamangaonkar were "detained" in Shirdi.

> Shirdi, Thursday 8 February 1912
>
> I got up for Kakad Arti and after it began the routine of the day.
> Narayanrao Vamangaonkar got permission to return. So he had some things for delivery at Amravati from my wife and actually left by a Tonga. Before he started, Ganpatrao, the son of the Karbhari[346] of my relation Mutalik of Satara, came with the customary presents of sesamum for Til Sankrant. They consist of very artistically made things out of sugared sesamum.
> Balvant for the first time in these three weeks ventured out as far as the Masjid and *put his head on the feet of Sayin Maharaj*. He has improved so far. Ganpatrao wishes my son Balvant to go with him to Satara for Rang Panchami. I referred him to Sayin Saheb.
> The midday Arti went on as usual except toward the end when *Sayin Saheb exhibited anger*.
> We spent the afternoon as usual in Dixit reading Ramayan and I reading to myself Dasbodh. We held our Panchadashi class also in the morning.
> *We saw Sayin Saheb at his evening stroll*.
> One Mr. Kulkarni has come here from Bombay. He has a laboratory there where he tests ores, etc. He said he saw me at Surat in 1907. We sat talking about old things.
> At night, Bhishma had his Bhajan and Dixit read Ramayan.

Khaparde's wife takes advantage of Sai Baba's granting permission to Narayanrao Vamangaonkar to leave Shirdi by entrusting him with various items to be delivered to their hometown. Owing to their prolonged stay in Shirdi, the Khapardes customarily relied on trusted individuals passing through Amravati to convey whatever was needed.

Most significantly, on this day the diarist records an improvement in his son's health: "for the first time in these three weeks", Balvant was able to leave his room and walk as far as the mosque in order to "place his head at the feet" of the *faqīr*, thereby expressing his gratitude for his recovery. The fact that one Ganpatrao proposed that Balvant accompany him to the town of Satara in southern Maharashtra for the celebration of the colorful

346 A chief administrator; the title of a senior official in certain Indian princely states.

Raṅg Pañcamī festival – held five days after Holī,[347] which in 1912 fell on 2 March – suggests that a full recovery was anticipated. Khaparde, quite naturally, advised Ganpatrao to seek Sai Baba's permission in the matter; as noted in the diary entry of 10 February, such permission was indeed granted.

Khaparde further notes that during the midday *ārtī* the *faqīr* "exhibited anger". Although the precise cause of this display remains unclear, it may be conjectured that it was related to the performance of the ritual itself. Sai Baba often appeared uneasy with the formalized worship offered by his devotees, and such ceremonies could provoke expressions of displeasure. Nevertheless, around 1916, when an intolerant Rohilla objected to his being venerated as a deity by Hindus and criticized practices such as the consumption of food offered to idols, "Baba only smiled and said 'All that (i.e., other Gods) is Allah'".[348]

> Shirdi, Friday 9 February 1912
>
> I got up as usual, prayed, and attended the Panchadashi class. During it *we saw Sayin Maharaj go out*.
> After finishing the class, I went to the Masjid. *Sayin Baba was in very good mood*. The young boy Kishya whom we call Pishya[349] came there as usual. ***On seeing him Sayin Saheb said that Pishya was a Rohilla in his previous birth, that he was a very good man, that he prayed long and came as guest to Sayin Saheb's grandfather. The latter had a sister who used to live separate. That Sayin Saheb was a young boy himself then and playfully suggested that the Rohilla should marry her. This was to be, and he did eventually marry her. The Rohilla lived there with his wife for a long time and ultimately went away with her, nobody knew where. He died and Sayin Saheb put him into the womb of his present mother. Pishya, he said, would be very fortunate and the protector of thousands***.
> The midday Arti passed off as usual. During it *Sayin Saheb said something to Shivanand Shastri and made signs*. The Shastri unfortunately did not catch their import. *Sayin Saheb made signs to Bapusaheb Jog also*.
> Mr. Oke, pleader of Thana, is here. I asked him to remember me to Baba Gupte and other friends.
> In the afternoon there was Ramayan read by Mr. Dixit as usual. Then *we went to see Sayin Saheb go out for his stroll* and in the evening attended the Shej Arti after the Wada Arti.
> At night, Bhishma read Bhagavat and Dixit read Ramayan.

Khaparde records another of Sai Baba's autobiographical narratives, delivered during the morning gathering at the mosque. The account centers on the previous life of a young boy, said to have been a Rohilla, that is, a

347 Characterized by a degree of social reversal preceding the start of the new year, its most striking features include the throwing of colored powder and water, the exchange of jokes and obscenities, and the lighting of bonfires. The name of the festival derives from its association with the demoness Holikā, whose story is recounted in various forms, all culminating in her destruction.

348 Narasimhaswami, *Devotees' Experiences*, 11. This episode was narrated to Narasimhaswami by Justice M.B. Rege in June 1936.

349 The nickname Pishya may derive from *pisā*, meaning 'foolish'.

Muslim Pathan. The moment the boy appeared before him, the *faqīr* – who was "in very good mood" – began to disclose details of the boy's prior birth as well as of his own youth. The narrative presents itself as quasi-historical, purporting to recover the circumstances of a relatively recent past. Sai Baba explains that it was the Rohilla's virtuous disposition and devout prayers that led to his being received as a guest in his grandfather's household. He further recounts that it was he himself, then a young boy, who playfully suggested that the Rohilla should marry his grandfather's sister – that is, his great-aunt, who used to live separately. The Rohilla "did eventually marry her", thus fulfilling the destiny seemingly set in motion by the young Sai, and resided there with his wife "for a long time", implying a close familial bond with the future saint. Although the couple ultimately went away together, and no one knew where, the *faqīr* declares that, following the man's death, he located his soul and placed it "into the womb of his present mother".

Two elements of this narrative are particularly striking. First, Sai Baba attributes to himself a supreme power – namely, the divine prerogative of determining the circumstances of a soul's rebirth. Second, the account presents a Muslim Pathan being reborn as a Hindu, insofar as the name Kishya appears to be a variant of Kishan (Kṛṣṇa). This motif, already encountered in other narratives, underscores Sai Baba's disregard for distinctions of caste and creed: a person's true identity is spiritual and transcends the social hierarchies of *varṇa* and *jāti*, as well as formal religious affiliation, all of which he treats as secondary and mutable.

Through this account, Sai Baba further reveals that Kishya (or Pishya) is intimately connected with him and predicts that he will enjoy a fortunate life, becoming "the protector of thousands", a phrase suggestive of future wealth and influence. The implication is that the *faqīr* was linked to this soul's karmic trajectory both in his own youth – when the Rohilla, in his previous life, was already an adult – and in his later years, when Kishya/Pishya appears as a "young boy" in 1912. The underlying idea is that, once contact with the *guru* is established, the latter assumes full responsibility for the devotee, guiding him or her across successive births toward the ultimate goal, namely, union with the divine.

In conclusion, Khaparde notes that the *faqīr* "made signs" to Shivanand Shastri – who, however, "did not catch their import" – as well as to Bapusaheb Jog, though it remains unclear whether the latter understood them. Sai Baba's bodily gestures – expressed through movements of the head, the gaze of his eyes, and the motions of his hands – were enigmatic, leaving the devotees puzzled as to their meaning. As was often the case, the saint offered no explanation.

Shirdi, Saturday 10 February 1912

I attended Kakad Arti in the morning.
Ganpatrao obtained permission this morning to go to Satara with my son Balvant. Madhavrao Deshpande was with them at the time.
I, Bapusaheb Jog, Upasani, and Mrs. L. Kaulgi had our Panchadashi class, and after it I went to the Masjid.
Sayin Baba was in a very pleasant mood and said that his body had been severed from his legs, that he can raise up the former, but not the latter. He said he had a fight with the Teli, that ***when he was young he raised money for family***

> ***purposes and agreed to serve the creditor to repay the debt, but he found he could not work; so he applied marking nut to his eyes and another irritant (shar) to his body and became ill. He was laid up for a year, but as soon as he recovered he worked night and day and paid off the debt.*** *He sat talking very pleasantly, but towards the end of the midday Arti, began to exhibit signs of impatience.*
> Mr. Gadre, pleader of Nasik, is here. I met him in Dixit's Wada and sat talking with him. I knew him before.
> Mr. Dixit read Ramayan in the afternoon and at night. Bhishma had Bhajan in the evening.
> Ganpatrao and my son Balvant went today to Amravati. From there they will proceed to Satara. We naturally miss them very much.

At the morning gathering in the mosque, Khaparde found Sai Baba "in a very pleasant mood" and disposed to converse. The *faqīr*'s remark that "his body had been severed from his legs", such that he could raise the former but not the latter, may plausibly allude to a condition of physical debility, to which he occasionally referred. It is conceivable that he was referring to a temporary paralysis, insofar as he indicates that he could lift the upper part of his body – including his head and arm – but not his legs.

At the same time, the statement may also admit of a more literal interpretation. The *Shri Sai Satcharita* (chap. 7, vv. 60-9) reports that "sometimes he would practice *Khand-yoga,*[350] separating hands, legs, etc., from the trunk. And these parts of his body could be seen fallen off at different places in the mosque. And when the people, in large numbers, came running to see the shocking spectacle of his body thus severed into parts, what they always saw was Baba, whole and in one piece".[351] Such dismemberment and reconstitution of the body is a motif well attested in shamanic traditions, where it signifies a form of symbolic death and spiritual rebirth. This extraordinary capacity, noted by numerous witnesses according to the *Shri Sai Satcharita,* is also described by Abdul Ghani Munsiff:

> Sai Baba was a '*ghouse*' type of spiritual personality. This *ghouse* type of master is very rare. […] [F]or their inner work, Perfect Ones sometimes enter the *ghouse* state and parts of their physical bodies separate. When that particular phase of work is finished, parts of their bodies automatically join together again when they return to gross (bodily) consciousness. It is a curious observation that Sai Baba had this *ghouse* characteristic. Since he was in charge of World War I, it could relate to all those human bodies that were shattered into pieces and their limbs scattered over the battlefields. […] Each night, it seems, Sai Baba entered the *ghouse* state. […] The *ghouse* state, according to some, is a rare state of spiritual ecstasy witnessed in saintly persons. It connotes, according to Sufis, a certain stage of spirituality (*Ghousiyat*) wherein the divine aspect of love is so very intense and overpowering as to effect visibly even the separation of the limbs of the physical body as stated above. It is also said that saints having this state of spiritual ecstasy do not long remain

350 A yogic practice by which one is said to be able to separate one's limbs; the verbal root *khaṇḍ* means 'to break' or 'to divide'.

351 Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita,* 109.

> in it; they eventually outgrow the experience. This *ghouse* characteristic is also predominant in some God intoxicated persons – *masts*.[352]

In addition to his recurrent reference to having "had a fight with the Teli", Sai Baba recounts an episode from his youth which, despite its moral overtones, need not be read as purely symbolic but may be at least partially autobiographical. The narrative depicts him as raising money to assist his family and subsequently laboring "night and day" in the service of a creditor until he had "paid off the debt". In this portrayal, he appears as an exemplary son who, faithful to his word, repays his obligations through sustained effort. His sense of duty is further underscored by the detail that he had been ill for an entire year and, upon recovery, resumed work with renewed determination in order to discharge his debt as swiftly as possible.

It is noteworthy that the substances he employed – namely, marking nut (*bibā*; *Semecarpus anacardium*) for his eyes and another irritant (*śara*, a type of reed or grass; *Saccharum sara*) for his body – apparently exacerbated his condition to the extent that he was "laid up for a year". The *faqīr*'s admission of the failure of this treatment is striking. Elsewhere, however, he is credited with effecting remarkable cures using similar substances. Narasimhaswami reports:

> At times when he was not absorbed in contemplation, he went about meeting people and noting their ailments. He picked up herbs or got cheap drugs from shops and with their use cured the villagers of their bodily illness. His knowledge of medicine and surgery appears to have been extraordinary for he cured not merely snake bite but also leprosy with snake venom and rotting eyes with *Bibba*, that is, washermen's marking nut [...] as an aseptic alkali. He pulled out the rotting eyeballs of some patient, washed them, applied *Bibba* as a caustic and replaced the eyeball and the disease was cured. He never accepted any payment for his medical or other services.[353]

This account suggests that Sai Baba occasionally resorted to unconventional or even apparently contraindicated remedies, perhaps in order to demonstrate that healing ultimately derived not from human means but from divine agency.[354]

Khaparde further notes that, toward the end of the midday *ārtī*, Sai Baba "gave signs of impatience", once again indicating his discomfort with the formal worship offered by his devotees. On this day, however, an important development occurred: Khaparde's son Balvant was granted permission to leave Shirdi in the company of his friend Ganpatrao. Accompanied by Madhavrao Deshpande, who acted in his customary role as intermediary, they had approached Sai Baba in the early morning, and he raised no objection, granting his consent. This may be interpreted as a form of recompense for Balvant after his recent illness – a kind of restorative

352 Munsiff, *Sai Baba*, 41-2. For further discussion, see also Rigopoulos, "Sāī Bābā and Yoga Powers", 409-12. For Meher Baba's extensive discussions of *mast*s and his prolonged engagement with them, see Donkin, *The Wayfarers*.

353 Narasimhaswami, *Life of Sai Baba*, 1: 20-1. On Sai Baba's treatment of inflamed eyes using *bibā* seeds, see Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 108-9 (chap. 7, vv. 46-52). See also Rigopoulos, *Life and Teachings*, 65.

354 See Satpathy, *An Inspiring Life*, 163.

respite. Balvant accordingly departed the village for his home in Amravati, from where he and Ganpatrao were to proceed to Satara to participate in the festival of Raṅg Pañcamī. Khaparde's concluding remark that "we naturally miss them very much" – the "we" referring primarily to himself and his wife Lakshmibai – is noteworthy, as it constitutes one of the few instances in the diary in which he gives explicit expression to his personal emotions.

Shirdi, Sunday 11 February 1912

By the time I finished my prayer this morning, I found Mr. Gadre up and sat talking with him. He got permission to return and went back to Nasik.
We saw Sayin Saheb go out and held our Panchadashi class with Upasani, Bapusaheb Jog and Mrs. L. Kaulgi. Mr. Lele, who is Revenue Inspector of Nasik District, also attended the class. He appears a very nice man and *Sayin Maharaj likes him much*.
I went to the Masjid as usual after Sayin Baba returned and found many men sitting there. They were mostly strangers. Among them was one of Akola Police, who, on seeing me, said that he had resigned his post and had taken service with Govindrao Deshmukh, Barrister of Nagpur.
After the midday Arti and meal, I lay down for a while and then attended the Puran of Ramayan by Mr. Dixit.
Later on, *we went to see Sayin Baba at his evening stroll* and meeting Mr. Lele there stood talking with him.
In the evening there was the Wada Arti and, later on, the Shej Arti, Bhishma's recital of Bhagavat and Mr. Dixit's Ramayan.
Shivanand Shastri did not get permission today to return.

Khaparde's entry attests to the growing popularity of the Shirdi *faqīr*, noting that "many men" crowded the mosque. These were "mostly strangers", arriving from various towns and regions of the Bombay Presidency and, quite possibly, from other parts of India as well. As Madhavrao Deshpande is reported to have remarked: "[T]his mosque is never empty. Someone or other keeps coming all the time for Baba's darshan".[355] The majority of these visitors appear to have been drawn by Sai Baba's reputation as a miracle-worker, renowned for effecting cures and bestowing material benefits.

Among those present, Khaparde mentions one Mr. Lele, a Revenue Inspector from Nasik District, who attended the *Pañcadaśī* class and whom "Sayin Maharaj likes much", as well as a policeman from Akola, a city in the Vidarbha region, who seems to have been acquainted with the diarist. The principal urban centers of Vidarbha – both historically and at present – are Amravati, Khaparde's hometown, Nagpur, and Akola.

Shirdi, Monday 12 February 1912

I got up early and attended the Kakad Arti.
Later on, we held our Panchadashi class and *saw Sayin Baba go out*.
The midday Arti passed as usual.
I spoke to Bapusaheb Jog to ask Dada Kelkar if reading in the afternoon from 5 to 6 would suit him. Bapusaheb Jog

355 Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 599 (chap. 36, v. 130).

> forgot to ask him. In the afternoon, Mr. Dixit read Ramayan as usual.
> As I descended the stairs after it, Shivanand Shastri who is still here drew my attention to a man who has come here and shows signs of being in a frenzy. The man moved his hands and feet, glared about, threw shoes at us. I called Mr. Dixit. At one time we thought him drunk. Later on, it appeared he only pretended to have got into a religious frenzy to gain consequence. I took him to Sayin Baba *who ordered him out*.
> Mr. Sane, the father of the Mamlatdar of Kopargaon, came today and sat talking with us for some time. He is a very nice gentleman of the old type and said that he saw me first at Dhulia during the Provincial Conference of 1908.
> After the Wada Arti there was Bhishma's Bhajan.
> I may mention that after the midday Arti I invited two men to breakfast. One was from Panvel and the other from Dharna Jari. They appeared religiously inclined and poor.
> Before Puran at night we went to the Shrimant Pujana ceremony[356] in connection with the wedding of the daughter of the local schoolmaster. Then we had Mr. Dixit's Ramayan.

In the afternoon, following Dixit's reading of the *Rāmāyaṇa* at the *vāḍā*, Khaparde observed a man displaying "signs of being in a frenzy". Initially, he and Dixit assumed that the individual was intoxicated; they soon realized, however, that he was feigning a state of religious ecstasy in order "to gain consequence", that is, to acquire renown as a holy man. Khaparde thereupon brought him to the mosque, where Sai Baba promptly "ordered him out". This incident illustrates that, with the growing popularity of the saint, Shirdi attracted a wide variety of visitors, including opportunists and religious impostors seeking to deceive devotees and enhance their own reputation.

By contrast, Khaparde himself enjoyed considerable prominence in Shirdi, owing to his public standing. He was frequently recognized by new arrivals: for instance, one Mr. Sane, described as the "father of the Mamlatdar of Kopargaon", informed him that he had first seen him "at Dhulia during the Provincial Conference of 1908".

In an effort to put into practice Sai Baba's teaching on *sevā*, Khaparde, after the midday *ārtī*, invited two visitors who "appeared religiously inclined and poor" to partake of a meal with him.

It is also noteworthy that, in the evening, he attended a ceremony celebrating the "wedding of the daughter of the local schoolmaster", an indication of the familiarity he had by then established with the residents of Shirdi.

> Shirdi, Tuesday 13 February 1912
>
> I was very late in getting up this morning. So all my usual program was correspondingly thrown forward.
> After prayer I, Upasani, Bapusaheb Jog and Mrs. Lakshmibai Kaulgi held our Panchadashi class and finished the second chapter.
> Then *we saw Sayin Saheb go out* and went to the wedding of the daughter of the local schoolmaster. His house is small

356 A ritual traditionally performed by the bride's father.

> and the people here would not oblige him by letting him put up a Mandap. So we sat in the Government Chavadi, smoking with Fakir Baba who was very pleasant. The wedding was celebrated later than what we thought it would be.
> Thence we went to the Masjid. *Sayin Baba was in a pleased mood* and the midday Arti passed off as usual.
> After it we returned and had our midday meal. My wife, Bhishma and Bandu fasted on account of Ekadasi.[357]
> I lay down for a while and then sat reading.
> Mr. Dixit went as usual to the Masjid after the midday meal and *Sayin Maharaj told him to rest a while*. So he returned and lay down and did not get up till about 5 PM.
> We should have begun our Paramamrit class then for the benefit of Dada Kelkar but he had to go out on some urgent business. So Mr. Dixit read Ramayan instead and then we went to the Masjid.
> *Sayin Maharaj gave me Udi as soon as I stepped in*. So I exclaimed that it was telling me to go away. Thereupon he said, *"Who tells you to go? Sit down". Then he sat talking pleasantly and* ***said that the cow now possessed by Mr. Dixit belonged originally to Mhalsapati. Then it went to Aurangabad; then to Jalna and has now come back as the property of Mr. Dixit. "God knows whose property it is".*** *Looking at me he said, "Nobody who has firm faith in God wants for anything".* My wife and others were there.
> *We all saw him at his evening stroll.*
> Then there was the Wada Arti and later on the Shej Arti.
> At night Bhishma had his Bhajan and Mr. Dixit read Ramayan.
> *Sayin Baba today both after the midday Arti and after the Shej Arti told me to go to the Wada specially calling me by name.*

The detail that, in the morning, while awaiting the celebration of the wedding ceremony of the schoolmaster's daughter, Khaparde spent time in the Government *cāvaḍī*, conversing and "smoking with Fakir Baba who was very pleasant", constitutes further evidence of his liberal disposition. The diarist was by no means sectarian in his conduct: he did not hesitate to share the *cilīm* with a Muslim or to engage him in conversation, displaying no concern about ritual contamination.[358]

Khaparde notes that during both the morning and midday *ārtī* Sai Baba was "in a pleased mood", and he observes that Hari Sitaram Dixit "went as usual to the Masjid after the midday meal", a detail that underscores the latter's intimacy with the *faqīr*. On this occasion, however, Sai Baba had nothing in particular to communicate to him and, noticing his fatigue, advised him to return to the *vāḍā* and "rest a while", which he did.

In the afternoon, when Khaparde proceeded to the mosque, Sai Baba immediately gave him *udī*, prompting the diarist to exclaim that he was being told "to go away". It is well known that the sacred ash, taken from the *dhunī*, was customarily distributed by the saint when dismissing devotees at the conclusion of his *darbār*s; this explains Khaparde's somewhat anxious reaction. This, however, was not Sai Baba's intention: he reassured him, invited him to sit, and engaged in a pleasant conversation with those

357 The eleventh day of each half-month, especially sacred among *vaiṣṇava*s. On this day, fasting is traditionally observed.

358 Remarkably, in his diary entry of 12 April 1920, Khaparde notes that he was "garlanded by Mahommadans [*sic*]"; Kunte, *Source Material*, 488.

present in the mosque, among whom was Khaparde's wife. It is worth noting, moreover, the saint's indulgence toward Khaparde: despite his being "very late in getting up", which meant that his entire routine "was correspondingly thrown forward", Sai Baba offered no reproach.

The *faqīr* then surprised his listeners by narrating the story of a cow that had originally belonged to his devotee Mhalsapati[359] and had recently returned to the village. He explained that, over time, the animal had passed through the hands of several owners in different locations, being first taken to Aurangabad and subsequently to Jalna – a town approximately thirty-five miles from Aurangabad – before ultimately returning to Shirdi as the property of Hari Sitaram Dixit. In Hindu symbolism, the cow represents abundance and beneficence par excellence, epitomized in the figure of Kāmadhenu, the wish-fulfilling divine cow, a manifestation of Devī. The cow/Kāmadhenu also occupies a prominent place in the modern iconography of Dattātreya, with whom the *faqīr* has often been identified.[360]

Sai Baba's central point is that all worldly possessions are transient, constantly passing from one owner to another. His concluding remark – "God knows whose property it is" – conveys the idea that ultimate ownership belongs to God alone. The cow, like all beings and things, is thus understood to be divine property; human beings are merely temporary custodians and should therefore act with humility, refraining from any sense of possessiveness. As Sai Baba repeatedly affirmed, Allāh is the sole *mālik*, the "master". In this vein, he is reported to have told Nanasaheb Chandorkar:

> Gain and loss, birth and death are all under God's control. But these foolish people do not realise this. They dance with joy when they get capital gains and cry bitterly when there is a loss. Joy and sorrow come from a sense of ownership. The stack that burnt did not belong to the Marwadi in the first place. The hay consisted of seeds that were sown in the earth. The clouds watered them and the sun kneaded them into shape. Thus the earth, the cloud and the sun are the real owners. All the things in this world are thus produced. […] The Lord gives with one hand and he takes with the other. It is this sense of ownership that is the root cause of joy and sorrow.[361]

Sai Baba's words to Khaparde – "Nobody who has firm faith in God wants for anything" – were intended to remind him that faith (*niṣṭhā*) is the fundamental virtue that he, like all devotees, must cultivate, since the saint would always care for his followers and never abandon them. As he is elsewhere reported to have said:

> Fifty thousand came and fifty-six thousand went, what do we have to do with that? Those who have unwavering faith and integrity, I will take

359 Totally devoted to Sai Baba, Mhalsapati lived in poverty, and the *faqīr* never provided him with any financial assistance. The *Shri Sai Satcharita* states: "Sai would not allow him to touch even a pice and said, 'Money will not tempt my devotee. He will never get caught in the splendor of wealth'"; Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 594-95 (chap. 36, vv. 61-71).

360 On the sanctity of the cow, see Valpey, *Cow Care in Hindu Ethics*. On the significance of the cow in Dattātreya's iconography, see Rigopoulos, *Dattātreya*, 227-8, 230-3, 238.

361 Chitluri, *Baba's Vaani*, 24-5.

care of them across the seven seas. I personally look after My people up to seventy-two generations.[362]

Sai Baba thus sought to encourage Khaparde to relinquish all anxiety and to entrust himself entirely to the divine.

Finally, the detail that, after both the midday and evening *ārtī*s, the saint "specially called" Khaparde twice by name serves as a further indication of his particular solicitude for him.

Shirdi, Wednesday 14 February 1912

I got up early, attended the Kakad Arti and was very much struck by the fact that *Sayin Baba, on leaving the Chavadi, made passes with his short stick towards the East, North and South. Then he proceeded with hard words as usual.*
We held our Panchadashi class as usual, *saw Sayin Saheb go out* and later on went to the Masjid as usual.
Sayin Baba told two stories. One was that there was a traveler who was accosted in the morning by a demon (Rakshasa). The traveler looked upon it as a bad omen, but on proceeding further met two wells the sweet water of which slaked his thirst. When he felt hungry, he met a husbandman who, on the suggestion of his wife, supplied food. He saw a field ripe with corn and wished to have Hurda.[363] The owner of the field gave it to him. So the traveler felt happy and proceeded merrily smoking. In the forest through which he was passing he met a tiger, lost courage, and hid himself in a cave. The tiger was very big and wandered about him. Sayin Baba happened to be passing that way, instilled courage into the traveler, got him out and put him on his way, saying: "The tiger would not hurt unless you hurt him some way". The other story was that Sayin Baba had four brothers,[364] one of whom used to go out, beg, and bring cooked food, bread and corn. His wife used to give out just enough for their father and mother, but starved all the brothers. Sayin Baba then got a contract, brought the money home and everyone was supplied with food including the well-to-do brother. Later on, the brother got leprosy. Every one shunned him. The father turned him out. Then Sayin Baba used to feed him and see to his comforts. Ultimately the brother died.
The midday Arti passed off as usual and after it we had our food and I had some rest.
Shivanand Shastri and Thakur of Vijayadurga went away today.
The Vyahi[365] of the local master invited all to a meal today. I declined, but all others went. *Sayin Baba, at the evening stroll, asked why I did not go* and I told him the truth, that I could not manage two meals in the course of one afternoon. *Sayin Baba looked immersed in care, gazed steadily at the East and West, and dismissed us all with the usual words: "Go to the Wada".*
At night, Bhishma had his Bhajan and Mr. Dixit read Ramayan.

362 Mehta, *Purna Parabrahma,* 104.

363 Tender sorghum stalks roasted over hot coals, a very tasty dish.

364 The presence of four brothers in the saint's parables is a recurrent motif; see Chitluri, *Baba's Vaani,* 134-5.

365 The schoolmaster's daughter's father-in-law.

Khaparde's reference to the fact that Sai Baba, upon leaving the *cāvaḍī* for the mosque after the *kākaḍ ārtī*, "made passes with his short stick towards the East, North and South", is understandably something that "struck him very much". In the *Shri Sai Satcharita*, Dabholkar similarly notes: "[E]veryday in the evening, Baba would come before the *Chavadi* and would stand engrossed in saluting all the directions by shaking his head and the index finger".[366] On several occasions, moreover, the *faqīr* is said to have sprinkled water in various directions.[367] Devotees interpreted such gestures as acts intended either to avert malevolent forces or to effect ritual purification. Thus, his famous grinding of wheat at the mosque and his subsequent command that the flour be scattered along the village boundary near the brook – a scene that inspired Dabholkar to compose the *Shri Sai Satcharita* (chap. 1, vv. 104-39) – was understood as a ritual act through which he warded off a cholera epidemic.[368]

It may be argued that Sai Baba's encompassing of space through the symbolic structure of the cardinal directions – with the saint himself standing at the center of the four quarters – was intended ritually to control and reorder the cosmos through the agency of his ascetic staff or scepter (*daṇḍa*). His "making passes" with the stick thus functioned as a protective ritual gesture capable of averting chaos and re-establishing cosmic harmony.[369] The omission of the western direction may perhaps reflect its association with the

366 Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 361 (chap. 22, v. 131). The same source states that he stood "facing the north"; see *ibid*., 618 (chap. 37, v. 156), 619 (chap. 37, v. 164), 853 (chap. 51, v. 237), 854 (chap. 51, v. 240).

367 When he went to the latrines in the so-called Lendi area – the name deriving from a stream on the outskirts of the village – the *faqīr* "would pour out water in various directions […]. Why that was done, Abdul could not say, nor whether any *mantra* accompanied the action. Except Abdul, no one else would be present when Baba scattered the water"; Narasimhaswami, *Life of Sai Baba*, 3: 173. In Narasimhaswami's *Sri Sai Baba's Charters and Sayings* (267-8) we read: "Baba to Abdul: 'Abdul, place some buckets of water next to that Akandam in the Lendi garden. See that that lamp (Akandam) is perpetually burning. Feed it always with oil'. Baba, after the buckets, full of water, were placed near the Akandam, would sprinkle water from them in all the cardinal directions and he would also stand up and walk a few steps in each direction and intently speak at the horizon on each direction, evidently to note and avert evils befalling his devotees". Concerning his visits to the latrines, Meher Baba remarked: "There (at the latrine) he would spend an hour, during which time he would bring under his surveillance all the stars. This was routine, and easily done – for at the time he created the universe he had given infinite thought and care to all eventualities and possibilities. Now there was only a touch here and there required to keep it all going smoothly" (Brabazon, *The Silent Word*, 18). In the early days, Sai Baba used to sleep in the *masjid* together with the devotees Tatya Kote Patil and Mhalsapati, both of whom were especially dear to him. The sources report that the three slept with their heads oriented toward the East, West, and North respectively, their feet touching one another at the center; see Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 127 (chap. 8, v. 118); *ibid*., 108-9 (chap. 7, vv. 46-52); Rigopoulos, *Life and Teachings*, 85-6. At mealtimes, Sai Baba would invariably send his *prasād* first to Mhalsapati and Tatya; see Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 630 (chap. 38, v. 43). They accompanied the saint in all processions, with Mhalsapati standing to his right and Tatya to his left; see *ibid*., 853 (chap. 51, v. 238).

368 See Chitluri, *Baba's Rinanubandh*, 15. At the mosque, next to the *nimbar*, stood the hand mill. It is reported that "every day Baba undertook the chore of grinding the sins – the mental, the physical afflictions and the miseries of His devotees"; *ibid*., 40.

369 Sai Baba is reported to have drawn protective magic circles for the safeguarding of his devotees. We read: "The compassionate Baba went to the barn and took some water and poured it around the burning stack. He made a circle of water around the central stack. 'Let this central stack burn. Do not try to estinguish it. It's an offering to Agni *dev*. Nothing will happen to the rest of the stacks', said Baba. And so it came to pass"; Chitluri, *Baba's Vaani*, 24. See also Mehta, *Purna Parabrahma*, 52. The sources emphasize that the saint exercised control over rain, wind, and fire; see Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 175-8 (chap. 11, vv. 114-48).

setting sun and, consequently, with obscurity and inauspiciousness.[370] The "hard words" that, "as usual", accompanied his movement toward the mosque may therefore be interpreted as being directed against those hostile forces that he sought to restrain and annihilate through ritual action.

Meher Baba identified Sai Baba as what Sufis call the *Qutub-e-Irshad*, the 'pole' or 'axis' of the spiritual hierarchy, the supreme teacher (*sadguru*) among the five perfect masters of his age.[371] In this sense, Sai Baba was conceived literally as the central pivot of the universe, whose seemingly random or unintelligible actions possessed profound spiritual efficacy, radiating through time and space.

During the morning gathering at the *masjid*, the saint narrated two stories in which he himself appeared as protagonist. The first is highly symbolic in character, whereas the second is more likely to contain autobiographical elements. The traveler of the first narrative represents the spiritual aspirant who journeys without external guidance, relying solely upon conscience and goodwill. Although accosted at the outset of his journey by a flesh-eating demon (*rākṣasa*), he is ultimately preserved through the providence of the all-seeing deity, who provides both material and spiritual sustenance. The water drawn from the two wells that quenched his thirst may symbolize divine grace in abundance, as well as the fundamental spiritual dyad of faith and patient endurance (*niṣṭhā* and *saburī*). Likewise, the husbandman who offers him food at the intercession of his wife may be understood as a figure of God or Allāh, while the compassionate wife may perhaps represent the divine *śakti*.

The delicious *hurda* given to him by the owner of a fertile cornfield may in turn symbolize *ānanda*, the bliss that fills the spiritual aspirant as he advances along the path. The owner of the abundant field may again be understood as a figure of God himself, while the rich harvest signifies the exquisite fruits of paradise. Thus refreshed, the traveler proceeds happily, "merrily smoking", until he reaches a forest, symbolizing the inevitable period of trial and tribulation through which every aspirant must pass.

Within this forest he encounters a great tiger that "wanders about him", personifying human fears, above all the fear of death. Overcome with terror, the traveler loses confidence in himself and retreats into a cave, whose darkness may symbolize ignorance and disorientation. At this decisive moment, Sai Baba, the supreme master, "happened to be passing that way", graciously manifesting himself in order to rescue and guide the deserving aspirant, who thereby becomes his disciple. The central message of the story is that the *guru*'s presence is indispensable upon the spiritual path. As Sai Baba himself once declared:

> "The way is difficult. There are tigers and wolves in the jungles on the way". A devotee then asked: "But Baba, what if we take a guide with us?" Baba answered: "Then there is no difficulty. The guide will take you straight to your destination, avoiding wolves, tigers and ditches etc. on the way. If there be no guide, there is the danger of your being lost in the jungles or falling into ditches".[372]

370 See Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 360-1.

371 See Conybeare, *In Quest of Truth*, 304; Munsiff, *Sai Baba*. The other perfect masters are understood to have been Upasani Maharaj, Tajuddin Baba, Hazrat Babajan, and Narayan Maharaj.

372 Gunaji, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 9. See also Chitluri, *Baba's Vaani*, 14-15.

Sai Baba thus restores courage and self-confidence (*ātmaviśvāsa*) to the traveler-disciple, liberates him from the darkness into which fear had cast him, and guides him once more onto the luminous path leading toward spiritual maturity and liberation, that is, everlasting communion with God.

The concluding assurance that "the tiger would not hurt unless you hurt him some way" is of particular significance. It suggests that one who leads a holy life grounded in love (*preman*) and non-violence (*ahiṃsā*) – never harming any living being – may rest assured of divine protection under all circumstances. The tiger, symbolizing danger and fear, may ultimately be identified with the forces of evil themselves, represented earlier in the story by the *rākṣasa* who appeared as a sinister omen. Such forces cannot harm one who has fully surrendered to God and *guru*. A saying of Sai Baba closely paralleling this teaching is the following:

> Hari Sitaram Dixit: "The serpent kills people; so, when one sees a serpent, should he not kill it?"
>
> Baba: "No. We should never kill it. Because it will never kill us unless it is ordered by God to kill us. If God has so ordered, we cannot avoid it".[373]

Bharadwaja's interpretation of the tale converges with the foregoing analysis in several respects:

> Individual self, ego or *jiva* is the traveller. *Ajnana* (nescience) is the demon. Thirst for perfection is his hunger. Spiritual teaching is the food he got. The two wells stand for *viveka* or right discrimination and *vairagya* or dispassion. *Hurda* stands for grace. The mysterious depths of consciousness of a *sadhaka* or a seeker are represented by the forest. The tiger stands for the dangers that confront a seeker, the mystical powers which drive him off the true path to perfection. Only a *sadguru* can restore him to the true path.[374]

The second story concerns Sai Baba and his impoverished family and may preserve a recollection either of his youth or of a previous birth. One of his four brothers – perhaps the eldest – and the latter's wife are portrayed as selfish and mean-spirited individuals. This brother, although subsisting by begging, refused to share the bread and corn he obtained with his starving siblings, while his wife distributed food only to the parents. The fact that the brother himself begged for sustenance suggests that he too was a *faqīr*, albeit an ignoble one.

Sai Baba, probably the youngest brother, is depicted as the savior of the family. Refusing to live as a burden dependent upon the charity of others,[375] he "got a contract", that is, found employment, brought his earnings home, and distributed them among all members of the household, including the

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373 Narasimhaswami, *Charters and Sayings*, 118. This incident is reminiscent of a story about Guṇḍam Rāūḷ, who rebuked a woman for killing a scorpion; see Feldhaus, *Deeds of God in Ṛddhipur*, 114. Along these lines, see Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 365, 369 (chap. 22, vv. 175-6, 231).

374 Bharadwaja, *Sai Baba the Master*, 88.

375 Sai Baba always wished to remain independent, never expecting others to do things for him. He preferred to perform tasks himself and did not approve of others doing the work for him; see Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 632-3 (chap. 38, vv. 71-80).

affluent but selfish brother. Remarkably, he harbors no resentment toward the one who had formerly allowed him to starve, but instead displays equanimity and compassion toward all alike. Furthermore, when this "well-to-do brother" later contracted leprosy – an illness carrying severe social stigma and presented in the narrative as the karmic consequence of his conduct – his other brothers abandoned him, and even his father cast him out in fear of pollution. Sai Baba alone cared for him lovingly, "feeding him and seeing to his comforts" until his death.

The moral purpose of this tale is transparent: devotees are called to imitate Sai Baba's conduct by acting generously and compassionately toward all beings. One must avoid resentment, cultivate forgiveness, and remain attentive especially to the suffering of the poor, the sick, and the destitute. Bharadwaja aptly observes in this regard: "Irrespective of the attitude of others to him, a seeker should remember that his relations with others are a result of karmic links of past lives and he should be loving and considerate to them".[376]

Also noteworthy is Sai Baba's rebuke of Khaparde for declining the invitation to dine offered by the *vyāhī*, the father-in-law of the local schoolmaster, whose daughter's wedding Khaparde had attended the previous day. The *vyāhī bhojan* is an auspicious occasion during which the groom's family hosts the bride's family at a ceremonial meal. Sai Baba criticizes the diarist's failure to embody the spirit of brotherhood, for the sharing of food at the same table symbolizes divine grace and participation in God's kingdom. Recalling the words of Jesus that as long as the bridegroom is present his disciples cannot fast (*Mark* 2:19),[377] Sai Baba's devotees are similarly called to rejoice while he remains in their midst, cultivating fellowship and mutual love. Khaparde's reply that "he could not manage two meals in the course of one afternoon" is therefore superficial, since it focuses upon mere material quantity and fails to perceive the deeper spiritual and even eschatological significance of communal dining.[378]

Finally, the concluding remarks of Khaparde's diary entry are especially evocative. Sai Baba, during his evening walk, "looked immersed in care" and "gazed steadily at the East and West". Standing in contemplation of the setting sun and the beauty of the sky, he appears silently to impart a lesson in reverent attentiveness to nature's ever-changing light and colors. Thereafter, with his customary words, "Go to the Wada", he instructed the assembled devotees to return to their lodgings.

376 Bharadwaja, *Sai Baba the Master*, 89.

377 The sources suggest that the *faqīr* never encouraged his disciples to fast; see Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 527 (chap. 32, vv. 142-3).

378 In this connection, see Keune, *Shared Devotion, Shared Food*.



Figure 43 Sai Baba, seated, amid his devotees. This photograph was taken by Shivanna Poopal in 1909. The devotees' covered heads reflect a customary mark of respect in Sai Baba's presence

> Shirdi, Thursday 15 February 1912
>
> I got up as usual, prayed and held our Panchadashi class with Upasani Shastri, Bapusaheb Jog and Mrs. Lakshmibai Kaulgi. *We saw Sayin Saheb go out* and continued our class.
> After it, I went to the Masjid as usual and *sat listening to what Sayin Saheb was saying. He was in a pleased mood and* ***said that he had laboured very hard, had gone without food for months, fed on leaves of "Kala Takal",[379] Nimb*** [= *nīm*] ***and other trees. He said God was very good to him, for life never became extinct though all flesh got wasted and bones appeared to be in danger of crumbling away***.
> The midday Arti passed off as usual and after it we returned [to the *vāḍā*] for our meals.
> My wife and others wished to go to Kopargaon tomorrow for Shivaratri.[380] *Sayin Saheb thought it unnecessary*, but they persisted and ultimately *got permission in a way*.
> Today after the afternoon Puran we held a class for [= on] Paramamrit for the benefit of Dada Kelkar. We did not progress much as it was the first day.
> *We saw Sayin Maharaj at his evening stroll*, and then after the Wada Arti attended the Shej Arti. Balasaheb Bhate attended it. He used to hold the morchal before it came to me. So I tendered it back to him. I got a fan instead. Balasaheb Bhate has made considerable progress.

At the morning gathering at the mosque, Sai Baba, who was reportedly "in a pleased mood", spoke of a lengthy period – lasting several months – during which he labored "very hard" and subsisted without regular food, nourishing himself only on the leaves of the Black Palm – fan-shaped and edged with robust black teeth – as well as on the bitter leaves of the *nīm* and other trees. This account may be interpreted as referring to a period of intense ascetic practice. The eating of leaves is a practice to which Indian ascetics have frequently resorted, and *dalādana* (lit. 'leaf-eater') is a designation associated with various *yogī*s and renouncers. Particularly noteworthy in this connection is the Brahmin ascetic Dalādana Muni,[381] revered as the most ancient devotee of Dattātreya, the deity with whom the *faqīr* was, and continues to be, popularly identified.

Sai Baba is said to have carried his austerities to such an extreme that he attributed his very survival to the mercy of Allāh, since "all flesh got wasted and bones appeared in danger of crumbling away". The precise reason for this prolonged period of radical asceticism is not explained, nor is it clear whether he underwent such severe *tapas* during his present life – in his youth – or in some previous birth, although Narasimhaswami unhesitatingly

379 It most likely refers to the Palmyra Palm (*Borassus flabellifer*), a tree native to the Indian subcontinent whose fruits range from black to brown and contain a sweet, fibrous pulp.

380 'The Night of Śiva', also known as Mahāśivarātri ('The Great Night of Śiva'), is an annual pan-Indian festival celebrated in honor of Śiva on the fourteenth day of the dark lunar fortnight of the month of Māgha (January-February) or Phālguna (February-March). The observance involves fasting and the performance of various rituals with *bilva* leaves and water during a nighttime vigil.

381 He is the author of the *Dattalaharī*, a poem of one hundred and two stanzas in praise of Dattātreya; see Dalādanamuni, *Dattalaharī*.

assigns this *sādhanā* to a former incarnation.[382] In all likelihood, however, the account preserves an autobiographical reminiscence. It is well known that the *faqīr* generally discouraged extreme asceticism and taught most of his devotees, who were householders, to pursue spiritual realization while remaining in the world and leading simple, orderly lives. As Dabholkar observes in the *Shri Sai Satcharita* (chap. 17, v. 85), although Sai Baba himself had renounced worldly life, "he yet remained in the world".[383] Nevertheless, as Abdul Ghani Munsiff has pointed out, "in his personal habits he was ascetic to the last".[384] It is therefore plausible that he subjected himself to this intense discipline for purposes of purification and self-denial, perhaps under the guidance of his master.

Although Khaparde's wife and several other devotees had obtained "permission in a way" to travel to nearby Kopargaon for the Śivarātri celebrations, the *faqīr*'s attitude suggests that he regarded the plan with disfavor and considered it "unnecessary". In the end, they remained in Shirdi, as Khaparde records in his diary entry for the following day, because "they could not get a cart".

Finally, the account furnishes yet another indication of Khaparde's active participation in Sai Baba's evening procession from the mosque to the *cāvaḍī*. He "tendered back" the *morchal*, or peacock-feather fan, to Balasaheb Bhate, who had customarily carried it before Khaparde's arrival in Shirdi, and instead received "a fan", itself a notable emblem of spiritual royalty. Khaparde's remark that "Balasaheb Bhate has made considerable progress" suggests the high esteem in which he held him. Indeed, already in his diary entry of 7 December 1910, during his first visit to Shirdi, Khaparde had observed that Bhate "has been staying here for some time, and has a peculiar kind of calm on his face".

> Shirdi, Friday 16 February 1912
>
> I attended the Kakad Arti. *Sayin Saheb exhibited great grace accompanied by hard words.*
> We held our Panchadashi class in the morning after prayer.
> My wife and others could not go to Kopargaon as they could not get a cart.
> *We saw Sayin Baba go out.*
> Mr. Morgaonkar has come and distributed a translation of Para Puja.[385] There is a Shastri from Kalyan Bhivandi. He is staying with Bapusaheb Jog and is a very quiet nice man. We fasted today on account of Shivaratri.
> There was the afternoon Puran of Dixit and after it we held our Paramamrit class and made good progress.
> *We saw Sayin Saheb at midday Arti and also at the evening stroll. He was in a very pleased mood.*
> After the Wada Arti, there was Puran and Bhajan as usual.

382 See Narasimhaswami, *Charters and Sayings*, 210.

383 Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 275.

384 Munsiff, *Sai Baba*, 45. See also Rigopoulos, "Sāī Bābā and Yoga Powers", 419-20.

385 Lit. 'Supreme Worship'. A short Sanskrit hymn (*stotra*) attributed to Śaṅkara.

The regularity with which these collective reading and study sessions devoted to religious and philosophical texts were held is noteworthy. As seen above, collective scriptural study was not peculiar to Khaparde's stay in Shirdi, since throughout 1911 similar gatherings with friends had taken place at his home in Amravati. In Shirdi, however, this practice became an integral part of his daily routine, forming an important component of his *sādhanā*.

Particularly striking is Khaparde's description of Sai Baba as simultaneously exhibiting what appear to be opposite moods, namely "great grace accompanied by hard words" during, or shortly after, the *kākaḍ ārtī*. This bewildering yet deeply compelling characteristic was central to the *faqīr*'s charisma. Although, as the diarist observes at the end of this very entry, Sai Baba was often "in a very pleased mood", his unpredictability caused both visitors and *bhakta*s to exercise great caution in their dealings with him. People simultaneously loved and feared him, being firmly convinced of his divine omnipotence. His command was regarded as supreme – as he himself had declared on 22 January – and everyone in Shirdi believed that he remained fully in control of every situation. Even though devotees were frequently unable to comprehend what was truly taking place, they nevertheless remained convinced that both their own lives and the destiny of the world itself rested in Sai Baba's hands.

Shirdi, Saturday 17 February 1912

I got up early in the morning, prayed and held our usual Panchadashi class with Upasani, Bapusaheb Jog, Kunte Shastri of Kalyan and Morgaonkar. We finished the third chapter today.
We saw Sayin Baba go out and again after he returned. He was in a very pleasant mood and made jokes.
The midday Arti passed off as usual and after it we had our food.
Mr. Dixit is thinking of going to Nagpur for the Munj[386] of his son. He wishes to take with him as many from here as he can, but *everything depends on the orders which Sayin Saheb gives.*
In the afternoon there was Dixit's Ramayan and then we held our Paramamrit class and made good progress.
Later on *we saw Sayin Maharaj at his stroll.*
Then there was the Wada Arti and Shej Arti. At the latter, the big fan came to me.
On our return Kunte Shastri of Kalyan did Kirtan. He told the story of Uttar Gograhana.[387] He is an old man and considering his age which is 80 years, his powers of endurance, his energy and all else is very praiseworthy and remarkable.
Mr. Dixit had his Ramayan and Bhishma read Bhagavat.

386 Also known as the sacred-thread (*yajñopavīta*) ceremony, it is the rite through which males of the first three social classes (*varṇa*s) – primarily Brahmins – are invested at the time of their initiation (*upanayana*), marking the beginning of a period of studentship (*brahmacarya*) under the guidance of a teacher. This ceremony is among the most important observances in traditional Marāṭhī families and generally extends over two days.

387 A story from the *Virāṭa Parvan*, the fourth book of the *Mahābhārata*, commonly known as the *Goharaṇa* episode (chapters 25-69).

Khaparde's observation that Sai Baba "made jokes" is noteworthy. When he was in "a very pleasant mood", he evidently delighted in humor and playful conversation, as the diarist records in his entries of 16 and 17 December 1911: "He was in a very pleasant mood and sat talking and joking"; "He was in a very good mood and we enjoyed very much the jokes made by him". Dabholkar likewise observes in the *Shri Sai Satcharita* (chap. 17, vv. 146, 157-58) that the saint attached considerable importance to jesting and joking, being especially fond of humor. In this manner, Sai Baba fostered a sense of fellowship and intimacy among his devotees, who, in his presence, recovered something of the spontaneity and simplicity of childhood.[388]

The fact that no one left the village without the *faqīr*'s permission is once again emphasized in connection with Hari Sitaram Dixit, who wished to travel to Nagpur for the celebration of his son's thread ceremony. There were, indeed, no exceptions, since "everything depends on the orders which Sayin Saheb gives".

Khaparde further notes that during the evening *ārtī* "the big fan" came to him, and one may reasonably infer that he regarded the honor of carrying it with considerable pride.

> Shirdi, Sunday 18 February 1912
>
> Madhavrao Deshpande woke me up in the morning and after prayers attended the Kakad Arti. *Sayin Saheb took it very coolly, and hard words said as usual after it were of a very mild character.* Mr. Dixit is thinking of going to Nagpur for the thread ceremony of his son. He asked Sayin Baba to let me go with him and *got an evasive reply.* I feel almost sure that I shall not be permitted to go. My wife is very anxious to go. While I was in our Panchadashi class with Upasani Shastri, Bapusaheb Jog and others, Mr. Nanasaheb Chandorkar came and sat with Mr. Dixit. I met him when *I went to see Sayin Saheb* after our class. *Sayin Saheb was talking with him in the usual way, about Teli, Waman Tatya, Appa Kote, etc. etc.* The midday Arti passed off as usual except that towards the end of it *Sayin Baba got a bit impatient and told the people to clear out fast.*
> I had my food with Mr. Dixit in the company of Nanasaheb Chandorkar and I asked the latter to resume his conversation with me which was broken off when he was here on a short visit. He said the matter was in the hands of Sayin Baba. He has brought with him an artificial garden with a big moon such as we have on marriage ceremonies. It was ordered by Radhakrishna Bai.
> I lay down for a while. Then Nanasaheb went away about 4 PM and Mr. Dixit read Ramayan.
> Later on we held our Paramamrit class and afterwards *went to see Sayin Saheb at his evening stroll.* The 'moon' was lit and shed very splendid light. My wife renewed her request about returning to Amravati and *was as usual given an evasive reply by Sayin Saheb.*
> After the Wada Arti, Mr. Dixit read Ramayan and Bhishma had his Bhajan. We finished early to admit of Mr. Dixit and Madhavrao Deshpande making preparations to depart tomorrow early in the morning.

388 On the saint's humor and fondness for joking, see Narasimhaswami, *Charters and Sayings,* 271-3; Chitluri, *Baba's Vaani,* 101-4.

Once again, the diarist draws attention to Sai Baba's "coolness" at the time of the *ārtī*, although the "hard words" uttered by him were "of a very mild character". Khaparde also notes the saint's desire to remain alone around midday, when he instructed everyone "to clear out fast" from the *masjid*. The *faqīr* likewise gave his customary "evasive replies" both to Dixit and to Khaparde's wife.

In a conversation with Nanasaheb Chandorkar, the *faqīr* expressed himself "in the usual way, about Teli, Waman Tatya, Appa Kote, etc. etc.", which may be understood to mean that he was inveighing against such evil tendencies as lust, anger, greed, hatred, pride, and envy or jealousy, lamenting their prevalence everywhere.

Khaparde evidently greatly enjoyed Chandorkar's company. Unfortunately, although he had requested Chandorkar "to resume his conversation with him which was broken off when he was here on a short visit" on 10 December 1911 – at which time Chandorkar had been about to relate the instructions he had received from the saint – this proved impossible, since Chandorkar was obliged to leave Shirdi at 4 p.m. It was for this reason that he told Khaparde that "the matter was in the hands of Sayin Baba".

The artificial garden and the large moon that Chandorkar brought to the village at the request of Radhakrishna Ayi – whose heartfelt desire was to worship her *guru*-deity in a grand manner – were displayed the following day during the evening *śej ārtī*. It is difficult to determine precisely what these objects may have looked like. Khaparde merely specifies that the artificial garden and moon were "such as we have on marriage ceremonies". In Indian wedding celebrations, artificial gardens featuring elaborate floral decorations, hanging vines, floral chandeliers, and illuminated moon motifs are often employed to create a celestial and enchanting atmosphere. Radhakrishna Ayi and Chandorkar may well have regarded these embellishments as symbolic of the spiritual union between the individual soul (*jīvātman*) of each devotee and the universal soul (*paramātman*), identified here with Sai Baba himself. At the same time, the decorations may also have alluded to Shirdi as a paradisiacal garden and to the saint's radiant countenance, shining like the moon (*candramukha*).

Shirdi, Monday 19 February 1912

Mr. Dixit, his wife, Madhavrao Deshpande, Hiralal and others went away this morning. The Dixits went to Nagpur for the Munj of their son Babu. Madhavrao went to Harda for a similar ceremony in a friend's house.
After prayer we held our Panchadashi class.
Morgaonkar said that he lost his watch and chain. They were both valuable being of gold. They were searched for in vain.
We saw Sayin Saheb go out and again after he returned.
The midday Arti passed off as usual except that there were two *chamar*s instead of only one.
Balasaheb Bhate worshipped and wished to stay for the Arti, but *Sayin Saheb ordered him home.*
After food I lay down for a while and then we continued our Panchadashi class with our usual members. Later on Dada Kelkar, Bala Shimpi and others came.
We saw Sayin Maharaj at his evening stroll and after the Wada Arti attended the Shej Arti when the artificial gardens and moon were used for the first time. They looked very nice

> and attracted a large crowd. *Sayin Saheb did not appear to dislike them*. I think the moon is helpful.
> Bhishma read Bhagavat and ten Samasas[389] of Dasbodh tonight.
> Mr. Natekar alias "Hamsa" writes to me today to say that I ought to return to Amravati by the end of this month.

While Sai Baba granted permission to depart to several individuals, including Madhavrao Deshpande as well as Dixit and his wife, the Khapardes were effectively "detained" in Shirdi. Clearly, the *faqīr* was deemed to know better, and this circumstance appears to indicate that Khaparde remained in danger of prosecution and arrest by the British authorities, who continued to keep him under close surveillance.

For the first time, we are informed that a wealthy devotee, Mr. Morgaonkar, lost something of considerable value while in Shirdi, namely a gold watch and chain. Khaparde records that "they were searched for in vain", and they were never recovered. The suspicion naturally arises that the objects may have been stolen, since pilgrimage centers often attract thieves and pickpockets no less than pilgrims and devotees.

The fact that Sai Baba "did not appear to dislike" the artificial garden and moon – which Khaparde himself admired, remarking that they "looked very nice", the moon "shedding splendid light" and proving "helpful" in illuminating the evening darkness – suggests that he tacitly approved of them, much to the relief of the devotees and especially of Radhakrishna Ayi. Indeed, the display "attracted a large crowd". Likewise, the detail that "two Chamars instead of only one" were employed during the midday *ārtī* constitutes further evidence that the *faqīr*'s worship was becoming increasingly elaborate and ceremonially resplendent.

Notwithstanding Sai Baba's occasional annoyance and "hard words" concerning the performance of the *ārtī*s, the fact remains that he ultimately acceded to the heartfelt desire of his *bhakta*s to offer him congregational *pūjā*. He abandoned all resistance and allowed them to proceed according to their wishes, evidently recognizing this development as inevitable and beyond prevention. Moreover, the diary entry confirms that the *faqīr* permitted devotees to render him individual acts of worship as well. Thus, Balasaheb Bhate was allowed to worship him before departing from Shirdi, in obedience to Sai Baba's command that he should return home.

The fact that Mr. Natekar, alias "Hamsa", the spy allegedly sent by the British government to monitor Khaparde's movements, wrote him a letter urging him to return to Amravati by the end of February further confirms that the diarist remained in danger. Had Khaparde followed "Hamsa's" advice – and his own inclination – he would in all probability have been arrested immediately upon his arrival in Amravati. As Kevin R.D. Shepherd observes: "It is very difficult to avoid the conclusion that Khaparde's sojourn at Shirdi saved him from a lengthy jail sentence".[390]

389 The *Dāsbodh* of Rāmdās is divided into twenty major sections (*daśak*s), each comprising ten subdivisions known as *samāsa*s.

390 Shepherd, *Faqir of Shirdi*, 125.

> Shirdi, Tuesday 20 February 1912
>
> We attended the Kakad Arti and the remarkable part of it was that *Sayin Saheb left the Chavadi and entered the Masjid without saying a single word except "God is the greatest, of all"*.
> After prayer I, Upasani, Bapusaheb Jog, Bhishma and Mrs. Lakshmibai Kaulgi held our Panchadashi class.
> When I went to the Masjid after Sayin Saheb returned from his morning walk, *he said he wished to get the Masjid rebuilt. He said there was enough money for it and went on talking about it.*
> Some Baroda ladies of the Shirke[391] family have come here. They attended the midday Arti. It passed off as usual.
> Radhakrishna Bai had the eggs of stork hung up where Sayin Saheb sits and *he had them pulled down and thrown away*.
> We continued our Panchadashi class in the afternoon and I went to the Masjid about 6 PM. ***Sayin Saheb told two stories of which, do what I like, I cannot recall the first. I asked my wife and all those present and they also forgot which is wonderful. The other story was that there was an old woman living with her son. He used to assist in the disposal of the dead body of every body in the village and got remuneration for it. There prevailed a sort of plague and many died. So his emoluments were great. Allah met her one day and told her not to profit by the trade of her son. She spoke about it to her son but the latter paid no attention and eventually died. The old woman then maintained herself by spinning cotton. Allah told her to go to the house of the relations of her husband but she declined to do so. One day some Brahmins came to purchase cotton from her, spied out all the details of her house and broke into it at night. One of the burglars stood naked before her. She told him to run away, as the town people would murder him for his crime. So the man ran away. Eventually the old woman died and was born as the daughter of the burglar. I am not quite sure that I understand the story quite right.***
> *We saw Sayin Saheb at his evening stroll and at night.*
> After the Wada Arti, Bhishma read Bhagavat and Dasbodh.

The diarist translates into English the words uttered by Sai Baba while leaving the *cāvaḍī* and entering the mosque after the early morning *ārtī* as "God is the greatest of all". In the original, these words were most likely either Allāh Akbar or, more probably, Allāh Mālik, the latter expression being Sai Baba's favored formula and one that he is said to have repeated constantly to himself. In a similar vein, Khaparde had already noted in his diary entry of 7 December 1910 that the *faqīr* declared that "God is very great".

An especially interesting detail is the report that Sai Baba "wished to get the Masjid rebuilt" and remarked that "there was enough money for it", continuing to speak at length on the matter. The sources confirm that he eventually granted permission for the rebuilding and enlargement of the old and dilapidated mosque. At the same time, however, we read:

391 A Maratha royal clan found primarily in Maharashtra and the neighboring states.

> Although permission had been given, yet when the work was going on Sai Baba used to pull down the work and large heavy stones and other heavy building implements were hurled away by him from time to time. In this manner the work was pushed through. These acts of Sai Baba may appear strange to outsiders, but those who had been in closer touch with Sai Baba will feel convinced that Sai Baba never did anything without any good reason. At last the work of the *masjid* was completed and on the day it was so completed, as Sai Baba had gone to Nimgaon, he was brought from there in a procession with music, bands, etc. and ushered in state into the new *masjid* (Dwarkamai).[392]

Sai Baba's seemingly contradictory behavior – periodically "pulling down the work" and hurling away "large heavy stones" – may be understood as reflecting the tension between his radical *faqīr*-like renunciation of worldly honors and the practical demands generated by his rapidly expanding cult. The ever-growing number of devotees visiting the *masjid* for *darśan* necessitated the enlargement and embellishment of the structure. The presence in Shirdi of women belonging to the aristocratic Shirke clan of Baroda[393] in present-day Gujarat further attests to the widening fame and social prestige of the saint.

By intermittently disrupting the construction work, Sai Baba may perhaps have wished symbolically to distance himself from these developments, emphasizing that, despite the increasing grandeur of the mosque and the ceremonial elaboration of his worship, he himself remained inwardly unchanged and faithful to his austere *faqīr* identity. In this connection, it is noteworthy that he reportedly had someone "pull down and throw away" the stork eggs that Radhakrishna Ayi had suspended above the place where he customarily sat within the mosque. The ornament, which the devoted woman evidently regarded as an appropriate emblem of his divine 'royalty', appears to have exceeded the limits of what Sai Baba himself was willing to tolerate.

Much as he had done in his diary entry of 22 January 1912, Khaparde once again expresses amazement that neither he nor his wife nor any of those present at the mosque could later remember Sai Baba's first story. As previously noted, devotees believed that one could retain the saint's words only if he himself permitted it; otherwise, whatever he said would mysteriously vanish from memory without leaving any trace.

In the second story summarized by Khaparde, the *faqīr* himself does not appear directly. The statement that the old woman's son "assisted in the disposal of the dead" suggests that he and his mother belonged to a socially marginalized community, since occupations connected with corpses were traditionally regarded as deeply impure. At the same time, the narrative appears to identify them as Muslims, given that it is Allāh who reveals himself to the old woman. We are informed that, owing to a devastating epidemic – described as "a sort of plague" – the son's business expanded considerably and his "emoluments were great". Although Allāh instructed the old woman to advise her son "not to profit by his trade", the latter ignored

392 Pradhan, *Shri Sai Baba of Shirdi*, 42. On the new mosque, see also Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 100-1 (chap. 6, vv. 127-45).

393 Already in 1904, a Bai Sahib belonging to the royal family of Baroda had come to Shirdi to see Sai Baba. Although he brought with him a large platter of silver coins and another heaped with guineas, the *faqīr* refused to accept them; see Chitluri, *Baba's Vaani*, 98.

the divine warning. His subsequent death may therefore be interpreted as the karmic consequence of greed (*lobha*) and of his refusal to heed divine counsel.

The old woman, meanwhile, earned her livelihood by spinning cotton in her home. She later received a second revelation from Allāh, who instructed her, for her own safety, not to continue living alone but instead to reside with her husband's relatives, suggesting that she was by then a widow. The divine advice given to her is notably practical and straightforward, just as the warning addressed to her son had been morally straightforward. Yet the woman, like her son, stubbornly refused to comply with God's instruction. The subsequent report that "some Brahmins broke into her house at night" may accordingly be understood as the negative consequence of her disobedience.

Particularly striking is the detail that the intruders are Brahmins, who are said to have carefully planned the theft by visiting the woman's home beforehand under the pretext of wishing to purchase cotton from her. Through this narrative element, Sai Baba appears to suggest that moral worth and purity do not derive from birth or caste status, but rather from righteous conduct. The additional detail that one of the burglars, presumably a younger man, "stood naked before her" may imply either sexual assault or the existence of an illicit sexual relationship between the two. The fact that the old woman urged him to flee in order to avoid arrest and execution indicates that she had developed a strong emotional attachment to him, despite the differences of age, social status, and religious affiliation separating them. Following her death, she is said to have been reborn as the daughter of the burglar precisely because a karmic attachment appears to have developed between them.

Taken as a whole, the tale concerns the negative consequences that follow from the deliberate refusal to obey divine instruction. Human beings remain free to accept or reject God's will, and both the old woman and her son chose not to heed Allāh's guidance. Their decisions, however, led inexorably to suffering and misfortune. In the son's case, it was the craving for wealth that brought about his downfall; in the mother's case, it was a combination of self-reliance carried to excess and subjection to sexual desire – which may persist even into old age – that led her astray. Ultimately, the narrative may be understood as suggesting that the two principal causes of human ruin are sex and money, that is, the dual temptation of *kāminī-kāñcana*, a theme repeatedly emphasized by the Bengali mystic Ramakrishna Paramahamsa (1836-1886). Sai Baba's purpose in narrating the story was evidently to impress upon Khaparde and the other listeners the necessity of obeying divine guidance, relinquishing pride, and refraining from rebellion against the will of God, whose commands are invariably directed toward the ultimate good of his creatures, even when their deeper purpose may not be immediately understood.

> Shirdi, Wednesday 21 February 1912
>
> I got up as usual but my prayers were disturbed by the noise which Devaji whom we call Sakshatkari[394] Bua made. I managed to control my mind and finished my prayers.
> Later *we saw Sayin Maharaj go out* and held our Panchadashi class.
> After it, I went to the Masjid and *saw Sayin Baba being served* by the Baroda ladies of the Shirke family.
> A dancing woman of Bombay arrived today and sang a few songs in the Masjid. She says she is a pupil of Balkrishna Bua. *Sayin Baba heard her songs*.
> Then the midday Arti passed off as usual. *Sayin Baba was in a very good mood*.
> After the midday meal, I lay down for a while and then continued our Panchadashi class with our usual members.
> About sunset *I went to see Sayin Baba at his evening stroll and again after Wada Arti, for the Shej Arti*. The processions and other arrangements were very grand today.
> The Bhajan was with cymbals and all.
> The Bombay dancing girl gave a few songs in the Masjid also after the Shej Arti.
> At night, Bhishma read Bhagavat and Dasbodh.

The fact that, during the morning gathering at the mosque, Sai Baba allowed the ladies of the Shirke family from Baroda to offer him their *pūjā* suggests that he was pleased with their devotion.

The presence in Shirdi of a professional dancer and singer from Bombay, apparently a pupil of the celebrated Balkrishna Bua Ichalkaranjikar (1849-1926) – a distinguished vocalist of the *khayāl* genre of Hindustani classical music who introduced the Gwalior *gharana* style into Maharashtra – constitutes further evidence of Sai Baba's growing fame.[395] The detail that the *faqīr* "heard her songs" both in the morning and in the evening, permitting her to perform within the *masjid*, indicates that he appreciated her artistry. Indeed, Khaparde notes that, following her morning performance and the subsequent midday *ārtī*, Sai Baba was "in a very good mood".

The diarist further remarks that the evening procession was "very grand", thereby confirming that the saint was increasingly being worshipped with considerable ceremonial splendor.

394 This term designates one who has had a vision of God.

395 Balkrishna Bua Ichalkaranjikar was the first teacher of the Hindustani musician Vishnu Digambar Paluskar (1872-1931). Two years later, in 1914, the eminent Hindustani classical vocalist Abdul Karim Khan (1872-1937) came to Shirdi, and Sai Baba reportedly appreciated his singing to such an extent that he requested him and his entourage to remain in the village for ten days; see Chitluri, *Baba's Vaani*, 94-6; Nimbalkar, "Prasiddh Gāyak Pai", 17-18. On Abdul Karim Khan, see Kinnear, "Abdul Karim Khan, *Sangeet Ratna*, The Jewel of Music: A Bio-Discography", https://bajakhana.com.au/abdul-karim-khan-sangeet-ratna-the-jewel-of-music-a-bio-discography/?srsltid=AfmBOorGP6b1kOW7uRiOX7DE4sVLH9HpLdqUqGKPV0Toit_fDmTYKHia; Dixit, "The Immeasurable Contribution of Abdul Karim Khan to the Kirana Gharana", https://scroll.in/magazine/854819/the-immeasurable-impact-of-abdul-karim-khan-on-kirana-gharana.

> Shirdi, Thursday 22 February 1912
>
> This morning there was Kakad Arti and we all attended it. The ladies of the Shirke family went away soon after the Arti with their attendants. The Bombay dancing girl also went away with her men. She said she wished to go to Amravati.
> We held our Panchadashi class.
> After it, I learnt that my wife had a dream this morning that Sayin Baba sent her a message by Bandu to go away today before 9 AM. *Sayin Baba also asked Dada Kelkar and Bala Shimpi whether I was talking of going away*. There is note from Natekar ("Hamsa") that I would be permitted to return to Amravati about the end of this month. All this raised the hopes of my wife, but at the midday Arti there was no mention of the matter made by Sayin Baba.
> Madhavrao Deshpande returned in time for the midday Arti from Harda. His wife and children also came from Ahmednagar.
> After the midday meal I lay down for a while and then continued our Panchadashi class till nearly nightfall when I hastened to the Masjid, *saw Sayin Saheb and took Udi*.
> At night, Bhishma read Dasbodh and Bhagavat and had Bhajan. Mr. Balasaheb Bhate, Mr. Bapusaheb Abkari Inspector and some children of the latter came to see me at night and we sat talking for sometime on the usual subject of the wonders daily worked by Sayin Baba. Madhavrao Deshpande was also present then.

The diarist's observation that his wife dreamed of Sai Baba is noteworthy, since it was – and continues to be – a widespread belief among devotees that the saint communicates through dreams, granting *darśan*, imparting instruction, performing miraculous cures, and resolving adverse *karma*.[396]

The fact that Natekar, alias "Hamsa", the government detective, once again wrote to Khaparde informing him that he "would be permitted to return to Amravati about the end of this month", that is, within approximately a week, indicates the eagerness with which the authorities appear to have desired his return to his hometown, presumably in order to prosecute and arrest him. It is not explained how "Hamsa" could have known Sai Baba's intentions, which were generally regarded as inscrutable. The letter "raised the hopes" of Khaparde's wife, whose dream clearly reflects her desire to leave Shirdi. The detail that the *faqīr* asked Dada Kelkar and Bala Shimpi whether the diarist "was talking of going away" suggests that he was fully aware both of the situation itself and of the anxiety experienced by the Khapardes. Their hopes, however, were once again disappointed, since during the midday *ārtī* Sai Baba made no mention whatsoever of the matter. Thus, while continuing to detain the Khapardes in Shirdi, the *faqīr* granted permission to the ladies of the Shirke family and their attendants to return to Baroda, and likewise allowed the Bombay dancing girl and her entourage to depart for Amravati.

Khaparde's statement that in the evening he "took *udī*", having "hastened to the *masjid*" to see Sai Baba after his *Pañcadaśī* class had extended "till nearly nightfall", suggests that he received the sacred ash directly from the *faqīr*'s own hands. At the conclusion of every *ārtī* ceremony, Sai Baba

396 See Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 211-12 (chap. 13, vv. 164-72).

himself customarily distributed the *udī* to the assembled devotees as a token of blessing and grace.

The diarist's concluding remark that during the night he and several others "sat talking for some time on the usual subject of the wonders daily worked by Sayin Baba" is especially significant. As Khaparde had already observed on the very first day of his initial visit to Shirdi, on 5 December 1910, the favorite pastime of the devotees consisted of recounting to one another the miracles (*līlā*s, *camatkār*s) performed by their beloved *faqīr*, thereby attempting to penetrate his divine mystery more deeply. Madhavrao Deshpande, Sai Baba's closest *bhakta*, undoubtedly had many such stories to relate.

> Shirdi, Friday 23 February 1912
>
> I got up as usual, prayed and in the morning held the Panchadashi class. Besides our usual members, a lady from Nasik by name Mrs. Sundarabai was present.
> *We saw Sayin Baba go out and again at the Masjid after he returned to the Masjid.* ***He told me a story how, when he was young, he went out one morning and suddenly became a girl and continued to be so for some time. He did not give many details.***
> The midday Arti passed off as usual. Many people came to worship today.
> After the midday meal I lay down for a while and then continued our Panchadashi class.
> *Madhavrao asked Sayin Baba today about my return and got a reply to the effect that times being very unfavorable to me I would have to remain here a few months more.*
> In the evening *we went to see Sayin Baba at the evening stroll* and then, after the Wada Arti, there was Shej Arti and later on Bhishma read Bhagavat and Dasbodh.

The fact that a woman who had recently arrived in Shirdi from Nasik, Mrs. Sundarabai, was invited to attend the *Pañcadaśī* class suggests that participation was not restricted to men.

During the morning gathering at the mosque, Sai Baba narrated to the diarist an intimate episode concerning himself, namely that, "when he was young", he had temporarily changed sex and become a girl. Although he provides no further details, the account appears intended to emphasize his capacity for metamorphosis. According to the narrative, the transformation occurred "suddenly" and in an almost casual manner, when "he went out one morning". The naturalness with which he is said to have changed sex "for some time" – an assertion that must have greatly surprised Khaparde – may be understood as underscoring the saint's transcendence of fixed social roles and identities, insofar as he symbolically encompassed within himself both masculine and feminine dimensions.

From a broader Hindu theological perspective, the episode may be understood as suggesting that Sai Baba transcended rigid distinctions of gender and identity. In this respect, the narrative belongs to a wider Indic religious context in which divine beings and realized saints are frequently portrayed as capable of exceeding ordinary boundaries. Comparable motifs are evident, for example, in the figure of Viṣṇu as Mohinī (lit. 'the Enchantress'), the female *avatāra*, as well as in the utterances of *bhakti*

saints such as Basavaṇṇa (12th century CE), who speaks of himself as alternately male and female.[397] Sai Baba's temporary transformation may therefore be interpreted not merely as a miraculous occurrence, but as an expression of spiritual completeness and transcendence, indicating a condition beyond fixed social and ontological categories.

Khaparde further notes that large numbers of people had gathered to worship the saint. Despite the crowds, Madhavrao Deshpande once again succeeded in interceding on the diarist's behalf and asked the *faqīr* whether Khaparde might be permitted to leave Shirdi. Sai Baba's reply, however, was entirely negative. His remark that the times were "very unfavorable" may plausibly be connected with the efforts of "Hamsa" to induce Khaparde to return to Amravati. The saint evidently knew that, should Khaparde return to his hometown, he would place himself in danger. Sai Baba's final declaration that the diarist "would have to remain in Shirdi a few months more" – although in reality he remained there for only three additional weeks – effectively settled the matter.

> Shirdi, Saturday 24 February 1912
>
> I attended the Kakad Arti and then held our Panchadashi class.
> *We saw Sayin Maharaj go out* and later on attended the Masjid for the midday Arti. Everything went off very much as usual, and after the midday meal I lay down for a while.
> Mr. Sane, Mamlatadar of Kopargaon, and Mr. Nanasaheb Behare, Revenue Inspector, came with Balasaheb Bhate and sat talking for some time.
> After they went away, we continued our Panchadashi class but the progress was very slow.
> *We saw Sayin Baba at his evening stroll* and in the evening the Nasik ladies assisted in the Bhajan after the Wada Arti. They have good voices but they appear to be very weak and can make no sustained effort.

This appears to have been a rather uneventful day for the diarist – or, perhaps more accurately, a day devoted to quieting the heart and mind through acceptance of the *faqīr*'s will (*saṃkalpa*), while concentrating on the reading and exegesis of the *Pañcadaśī*, although, as he notes, "the progress was very slow", and on his own *sādhanā*. No utterance or action of Sai Baba is recorded for this day: whatever he wished to communicate to Khaparde had already been conveyed through Madhavrao Deshpande on the previous day.

The acquaintance of Mr. Sane and Mr. Nanasaheb Behare with Balasaheb Bhate is unsurprising, given that the latter was a retired *māmlātdār*.

397 In one of his poems, Basavaṇṇa states: "Sometimes I am man, sometimes I am woman"; Ramanujan, *Speaking of Śiva*, 87.

> Shirdi, Sunday 25 February 1912
>
> I got up early, prayed and saw Mr. Madhavrao Deshpande leave Shirdi for Nagpur. From there he will go to Gwalior for the wedding of Nanasaheb Chandorkar's son and will return by stages, seeing Benares, Allahabad, Gaya, Mathura and other holy places on the way.[398]
> We held our Panchadashi class but Upasani was feeling unwell, so our progress was slow.
> We attended the midday Arti and, after the midday meal, resumed our Panchadashi class and made some progress.
> In the evening, after the Wada Arti, we attended the Shej Arti and, after it, Bhishma read Dasbodh.

Madhavrao Deshpande was a deeply religious man. Although he regarded Sai Baba as his *deva*, the supreme object of devotion, this journey also afforded him a unique opportunity to visit the principal *tīrtha*s of North India. The fact that both Dixit and Chandorkar invited him to their respective family celebrations attests to the depth of their bond: they regarded one another as spiritual brothers. Moreover, for Dixit and Chandorkar, having Madhavrao Deshpande as a special guest on such important familial occasions was also a means of experiencing, as it were, Sai Baba's own presence, given Madhavrao Deshpande's exceptional closeness to the saint.

The remark that progress during the morning *Pañcadaśī* class "was slow" owing to the fact that Upasani "was feeling unwell" indicates that he possessed considerable proficiency in Vedānta and that his contribution to the study group was substantial.

> Shirdi, Monday 26 February 1912
>
> I attended the Kakad Arti. *Sayin Baba went to the Masjid without saying much.*
> The Nasik ladies went away this morning. Then we held our class and *saw Sayin Baba go out and again after he returned to the Masjid.*
> ***He told a story about a brother having misbehaved once and being outcasted in consequence. Sayin Baba looked after him and eventually had him readmitted to the caste.***
> The midday Arti passed off as usual and, after the midday meal, I lay down for a while and then we continued our Panchadashi class.
> One Mr. Datar has come from Poona with his son who appears to be a pleader. They are staying in the hall.
> We attended the Masjid *to see Sayin Saheb at the stroll.*
> After the Wada Arti, there was Bhagavat and Dasbodh and Bhajan in which Mrs. Kaulgi and Sonubai assisted.

In the early morning, the diarist notes that Sai Baba was in a silent mood and spoke very little. It is possible that the *faqīr* had likewise remained taciturn during the preceding two days, since Khaparde records none of his utterances for that period. Nevertheless, before the midday *ārtī*, the saint narrated a brief autobiographical story. There is no compelling reason

398 For an account of his pilgrimage, including his *darśan* of Sai Baba in Gaya, see Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 754-9 (chap. 46, vv. 25-90).

to doubt its authenticity, although it is equally possible that Sai Baba was referring to one of his previous lives.

The story highlights his compassion toward a brother who had been outcast on account of some unspecified misdeed. As is well known, outcasting may be either temporary or permanent, and in this instance it was evidently temporary. The nature of the brother's transgression is deliberately left unspecified, since this is not the central issue at stake.[399] What is crucial, rather, is the fact that outcasting constitutes a grave social stigma, depriving the individual of the social and economic support of his or her community. The outcast person is thus left isolated and abandoned to a wretched fate. Sai Baba, however, presents himself as acting in opposition to this harsh practice of exclusion and abandonment. He actively cares for his brother, attending to his well-being and rehabilitation, and ultimately succeeds in securing his readmission to the caste. In doing so, he restores harmony both within the family and within the wider community.

By narrating this story, the *faqīr* sought to emphasize that others ought to follow his example: brotherly love and forgiveness are the guiding principles that should inspire all human beings.

> Shirdi, Tuesday 27 February 1912
>
> I got up as usual, prayed and held our Panchadashi class. For once we missed Sayin Baba going out and *were not able to see him till he was on his way back*.
> When I went to the Masjid about 11:15 AM *Sayin Baba said that he walked through a field in which there were very big parrots. The parrots were not scared away by his presence and he stood long admiring their sizes and color*.
> The midday Arti passed off as usual and, after meal, I lay down a while and then resumed our Panchadashi class till nearly nightfall when *we went to Sayin Maharaj at his evening stroll*.
> At night there was the Wada Arti and then the Shej Arti. Bhishma read Bhagavat and Dasbodh.

For the first time during his sojourn in Shirdi, Khaparde missed seeing Sai Baba on his morning stroll. The *Pañcadaśī* class lasted longer than usual – perhaps because of the complexity of the text – and, as a consequence, he arrived late for the saint's *darśan*. Nevertheless, the *faqīr* did not reprimand him.

At the mosque, Sai Baba recounted how, while walking through a field, he had observed at close range several large and beautiful parrots that "were not scared away by his presence", a possible indication of the *ahiṃsā* that the birds instinctively perceived in him. The remark that he "stood long admiring their sizes and color" is particularly noteworthy, since it reveals the *faqīr*'s love of birds and animals in general – dogs, horses, goats,

399 One may speculate that the transgression concerned a ritual offense.

pigs, lizards, and even snakes[400] – as well as his reverence for the beauty and wonder of the natural world. On more than one occasion, Sai Baba is described as gazing at the sky and contemplating the sunset, and we also know of his affection for trees, flowers, and plants. As the *Shri Sai Satcharita* states (chap. 4, vv. 169-71):

> In the beginning, on the very spot [of the Sathe wada], there was a beautiful flower-garden grown by Baba, with his own hands. […] Sai Samarth would water the plants, thus raising a garden on the rocky barren soil.[401]

The *faqīr*'s remarks should be understood as an implicit teaching addressed to his devotees: Sai Baba wished them to 'learn to see' and to marvel at the beauties of nature, never becoming habituated to them, but instead contemplating them with awe as manifestations of God's wondrous creation. He regarded such an attitude as an important step toward realizing the sacredness of life and of every moment of human existence – the very fact of being here and now – which should never be taken for granted, but rather always cherished as a gift of grace.

Shirdi, Wednesday 28 February 1912

I attended the Kakad Arti and was on my return praying when Dhonde Baba arrived from Poona. He returned recently from Burma and I sat talking with him about the health of my friend Tilak and the state of his mind. It is as good as it can be under the circumstances. He wishes me to return to my practice at the bar, but that depends upon what Sayin Saheb orders.
We held our Panchadashi class and Mr. Balasaheb Bhate attended it.
We saw Sayin Saheb go out and later on I went to the Masjid after he returned. ***He asked me if Jivamuni would pay. I could not make out what Jivamuni meant but replied that Jivamuni would if ordered. He said Jivamuni would not.*** *He gave me a lot of fruits and sweets.*
The midday Arti passed off as usual.
Today was Ekadashi and nobody except myself and Raghunath had a breakfast or the midday meal. Dhonde Baba also fasted. He returned to Poona at about 4 PM with Bhau, son of Dada Kelkar.
We then continued our Panchadashi class and in the evening *went to see Sayin Maharaj at his stroll. He was in a very pleased mood, walked light, made jokes and so on.*
After the Wada Arti, Bhishma read Bhagavat and Dasbodh.

400 See Rigopoulos, "Animals in the *Shri Sai Satcharita*", 257-87; Satpathy, *An Inspiring Life*, 188-9. Sai Baba's devotee Shantabai Joshi recalls: "The Dwarka Mai was a place of refuge for the stray animals of Shirdi. Often he [= Sai Baba] would place a kid (young goat) on his lap and caress it. If it bleated he would give it a drink of water with his own hands. Dogs and cats sought refuge at his feet, and Baba had a special fondness for dogs. Then there was a black cow with white stripes; she and her calf had literally made the Dwarka Mai their home, and Baba would feed the cow and pat her on her back" (Chitluri, *Baba's Divine Symphony*, 30). Many contemporary Sufis are well known for their love of animals and for surrounding themselves with them; see Frembgen, "From Trance Dancer to Saint", 109-28.

401 Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 70. See also *ibid.*, 77 (chap. 5, vv. 46-51).

The diarist eagerly questioned his friend and fellow political activist Dhonde Baba, who had recently visited Tilak in Burma, regarding the latter's "health and state of mind", and was reassured that it was "as good as it could be under the circumstances". It should be recalled that Khaparde himself had visited Tilak in Mandalay Jail on 22 October 1910, while returning to India from England via Rangoon. Dhonde Baba had come to Shirdi from Pune with the express purpose of informing Khaparde about Tilak's condition and conveying the latter's wish that the diarist "return to his practice at the bar", thereby exerting additional pressure upon him to go back to Amraoti. Khaparde's brief remark that the matter "depends upon what Sayin Saheb orders" reveals the extent of his surrender to the will of his *guru*. In the hierarchy of his loyalties, Sai Baba's command clearly occupied the highest place; everything else, including Tilak's wishes, remained secondary.

Later that morning, Sai Baba posed a riddle to Khaparde by asking him "if Jivamuni would pay", that is, whether he thought Jivamuni would accede to his request. The diarist, however, was unable to identify who this "Jīvamuni" might be. Since the *faqīr* often assigned nicknames to his devotees, it is conceivable that the expression referred to one of them. In the present instance, however, it seems perhaps more plausible that Sai Baba had no particular individual in mind, but rather alluded to God himself – "the Silent One (*muni*) abiding within the embodied soul (*jīva*)". This remains a hypothesis, but one that is linguistically tenable as an interpretation of the compound. The further remark that "he would not pay", "even if ordered to do so", as Khaparde suggested, may reinforce the wordplay implicit in the name employed by Sai Baba: God, the Silent One,[402] remained unmoved, that is, did not grant the request. Although the precise content of the request is not disclosed, it may reasonably be conjectured that it concerned Khaparde's difficult predicament.

Sai Baba's gesture of giving "a lot of fruits and sweets" to the diarist constituted a tangible assurance of his blessings and of his continued intercession on Khaparde's behalf. Significantly, the *faqīr* had expressed similar sentiments three weeks earlier, on 6 February, when he remarked that "all were thieves" and that he prayed to God "night and day for their improvement or removal", yet God delayed and "apparently does not approve of the attitude and grant the prayer". Sai Baba added that he would "wait for a month or two and then see", but that, "whether living or dead", he would ultimately obtain what he had been praying for. He further declared that he would "not go to Teli or Wani, and never beg of them". Khaparde notes in his entry for that day that Sai Baba "mentioned a few thousand rupees", though he could no longer remember in what connection the remark had been made.[403]

The diarist further records that everyone fasted – except himself and one Raghunath – since it was *āmalakī ekādaśī*, the eleventh day of the waxing moon in the lunar month of Phālguna (February-March). *Ekādaśī*s, the eleventh lunar days, are regarded as especially sacred to Viṣṇu, and this particular observance is associated with the *āmalaka* tree (*Phyllanthus emblica*), the Indian gooseberry, in which Viṣṇu is believed to reside in a special manner. The tree is ritually worshipped on this occasion in order to obtain the deity's grace.

402 On silence as expressive of the ineffable reality of God, see Rigopoulos, *Life and Teachings*, 354-5. In the Old Testament, God makes himself known through the *qôl demamah daqqah*, 'a still small voice' (literally, 'a voice [*qôl*] of subtle [*daqqah*] silence [*demamah*]'); see *1 Kings* 19:12. For a Christian theology of silence, see Berger, *Schweigen*.

403 See *Shirdi Diary of the Hon'ble Mr. G.S. Khaparde*, 76.

Particularly valuable is the diarist's observation that Sai Baba, during his evening stroll, was "in a very pleased mood", that he "walked light", and that he "made jokes". The *faqīr*'s temperament could be highly unpredictable, and, as already noted, when in a cheerful mood he would often crack jokes and at times even skip or dance while walking.

> Shirdi, Thursday 29 February 1912[404]
>
> I prayed in the morning and held our usual Panchadashi class. While we were at it *Sayin Baba passed through and we saw him near the Sathe Wada. He appeared very much tired.* I saw him again after he returned and *he appeared to be in a very placid mood.* ***He said that Balasaheb Bhate was a Khatu, that his wife was a Saliu, i.e. weaver, and that his son Babu was also a Sali. Sayin Saheb said further that Wasudeo Kaka was a Rajput in his former birth and bore the name of Jaising, that he was fond of meat and that Sayin Saheb and others used to make him very angry by asking him if he wanted the head of a goat, that this Jaising had three sons who served in the army and a daughter who turned out bad, became the keep of a Barwar, bore children by him and died thus.*** The midday Arti passed off as usual except that *Waman Tatya who came after it and wished to worship got good harvest of hard words.*
> After the midday meal I lay down for a while and then we continued our Panchadashi class till evening when *we went to see Sayin Saheb at his stroll.*
> After the Wada Arti, I went to the Masjid to attend the procession to Chavadi and the Shej Arti there. *Sayin Saheb exhibited an angry mood, abused those that had got on to the roof of the Masjid for lighting lamps, and at the time when the procession started he threw his stick at Mrs. Tai Jog, the wife of Bapusaheb.*
> *At the Chavadi, I thought he would beat Bapusaheb Jog for he approached the latter, held his hands and demanded why Arti was done, but after a while he beat Bala Simpi with his stick and later on Trimbakrao whom he calls Maruti. Bala Simpi ran away but Trimbakrao received the blow standing and prostrated himself before Sayin Saheb. I think he received a full measure of favor and got ahead by at least a stage. Sayin Saheb was talking loudly when we returned.*
> I sat talking with Balasaheb Bhate. Bhishma read Bhagavat and Dasbodh.

This is the first occasion on which Khaparde notes that Sai Baba appeared "very much tired", adding that, upon returning from his morning walk, "he appeared to be in a very placid mood".

At the mosque that morning, the *faqīr* offered a series of revelations concerning the former births of some of his devotees. He stated that Balasaheb Bhate had belonged to a mercantile caste – *khatu* being a corrupt form of *khatrī*, denoting one engaged in account-keeping, banking, and the buying and selling of grain – whereas both Bhate's wife and his son Babu had been weavers (*sālī*). Sai Baba further revealed that Vasudev Kaka had previously been a Rajput named Jai Singh. According to the saint, he and others used to

404 The year 1912 was a leap year.

tease Jai Singh and provoke him to anger by asking whether he desired the head of a goat to eat, fully aware of his fondness for meat. Jai Singh's irritation may have stemmed from the fact that the goat was commonly regarded as a sacrificial animal offered by Rajputs to the Goddess. Since Jai Singh belonged to a community traditionally associated with warriorhood, it is unsurprising that his three sons were said to have served in the army of the clan to which he belonged. His daughter, by contrast, is described as having "turned bad", becoming the kept woman of a Barwar, an affiliate of a criminal community associated with marauding and plunder in Uttar Pradesh. She bore children by him and eventually died, her premature death being interpreted as the karmic consequence of her immoral conduct.

Khaparde further records that the devotee Vaman Tatya arrived at the *masjid* only after the midday *ārtī* had concluded. Despite his tardiness, he still wished to worship Sai Baba and was sharply rebuked by him, receiving, as the diarist puts it, "a good harvest of hard words". Khaparde also notes that, during the evening *ārtī*, the saint was in an angry mood and objected to the lighting of lamps on the roof of the *masjid* for the embellishment of the procession to the *cāvaḍī*. In his wrath, he even hurled his *satka* at Tai Jog,[405] the wife of Bapusaheb Jog. Upon arriving at the *cāvaḍī*, he clasped the hands of Jog himself – the *ārtī* officiant whom Sai Baba had personally appointed – and demanded to know "why Arti was done", thereby implying that there was no need for its performance and that he disapproved of it. After some time, he even struck two of his *bhakta*s with his *satka*: Bala Simpi, who fled from him, and Trimbakrao, who instead "received the blow" while standing and prostrating himself at the saint's feet. Khaparde comments that, through this act of steadfastness, Trimbakrao "received a full measure of favor and got ahead by at least a stage", that is, he accrued spiritual merit. According to traditional belief, a blow administered by the *guru* may serve as the catalyst for the disciple's spiritual awakening.[406]

On this particular occasion, the *faqīr* gave emphatic expression to his opposition both to the pomp of the procession and to the practice of congregational worship. As already noted, Sai Baba never actively encouraged his Hindu devotees to worship him, and for a long time resisted their attempts to honor him through the daily performance of *ārtī*s. Eventually, however, he came to tolerate these practices for the sake of the *bhakta*s, yielding to the sincerity of their devotion. In time, his acceptance of congregational worship became sufficiently explicit that he instructed Bapusaheb Jog to succeed Megha as the designated *ārtī* officiant after the latter's death.[407] As Khaparde's diary makes clear, Sai Baba ultimately accepted the entire complex of *ārtī* rituals not merely passively but actively, fully participating in

405 Regarding her, a source reports: "Baba loved and respected Tai Jog… very much. He lovingly called her *aaye* (mother). She was devoted to Him, and made whatever *prasad* He wanted and looked after the devotees that He sent to stay with her with great care"; Chitluri, *Baba's Rinanubandh*, 122. Moreover: "Tai was the epitome of *bhakti*. She was intensely devoted to Baba. Her love for her 'Guru' was so passionate that after Baba's *niryan* [= death] she lost self-control. She wandered the streets of Shirdi aimlessly, as if searching for her Guru. She had a vacant look on her face, oblivious of her surroundings. So desolate was she that she died two months later"; *ibid*., 69-70.

406 See Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 861-2 (chap. 52, vv. 62-6).

407 Kevin R.D. Shepherd's statement that "these rites did not occur at the instruction of Sai Baba, but merely gained his assent, at times very reluctantly", appears inaccurate; see Shepherd, *Faqir of Shirdi*, 143.

the ritual exchange with his devotees. At times, however, he felt a powerful impulse to reject such ceremonies altogether, even going so far as to cast aside or smash the ritual paraphernalia.

The saint's contradictory behavior reveals an inner tension: he appears torn between a personal reluctance to be honored as a divine being and the intense desire of the *bhakta*s to worship him as their *deva*. This psychological dimension is particularly revealing of his humanity. As the *Shri Sai Satcharita* states with reference to the saint's silver throne (chap. 10, v. 111): "Such a throne would, if anything, be only an obstacle to him. Yet if the devotees were to slide it underneath from behind, he would not try to resist, in deference to their feelings of love and devotion".[408] Sai Baba himself similarly remarked: "I am absolutely in the power of my devotees".[409] The heartfelt devotion of the *bhakta*s thus, in a sense, 'overpowered' him, leaving him with little choice but to comply with their wish to worship him. The detail that Sai Baba was still "talking loudly" when Khaparde returned to his lodging indicates that his anger and 'volley of abuses' continued for quite some time.

> Shirdi, Friday 1 March 1912
>
> I attended the Kakad Arti and then after prayer held our Panchadashi class but both Bapusaheb Jog and Upasani delayed as they got themselves shaved and we could not actually begin until Sayin Baba went out and *we saw him near the Sathe Wada*. When we did actually begin we made progress.
> I went to the Masjid about 11 AM and *Sayin Baba seemed to be in a very good mood but looked very much tired*.
> Trimbakrao came very much near to abusing Fakir Baba for what appeared to me to be a very trifling matter.
> The midday Arti passed off as usual. *Sayin Baba remembered Mr. Dixit, Nanasaheb Chandorkar and Sathe*.
> After meals, we continued our Panchadashi class and made good progress.
> *We saw Sayin Baba at his evening stroll* and at night there was Bhagavat and Dasabodh read by Bhishma. He also did the Bhajan and Balasaheb Bhate attended.
> A Teli living opposite to us died in the evening. His wife Sattrabai and daughter Gopi used to work as our domestic servants.

In the morning at the mosque, the *faqīr* was reportedly "in a very good mood" – in marked contrast to the bad temper he had displayed the previous night – though, once again, the diarist notes that he "looked very much tired". This should likely be interpreted as an indication of Sai Baba's advancing age and, possibly, of his declining health.

The detail that the *faqīr* "remembered Mr. Dixit, Nanasaheb Chandorkar and Sathe", that is, publicly mentioned their names during the congregational gathering at the *masjid*, attests to their importance as well as to the affection and concern he felt for them. These three figures played a central role within

408 Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 158. For other telling episodes, see *ibid.*, 169-72 (chap. 11, vv. 41-76), 209-10 (chap. 13, vv. 134-46).

409 Dabholkar, *Shri Sai Satcharita*, 172 (chap. 11, v. 76).

the saint's circle of devotees, and Sai Baba evidently relied upon them for the consolidation and expansion of his mission.

Khaparde's concluding remark that an oil vendor "living opposite to us died in the evening", and that his wife and daughter "used to work as our domestic servants", is equally noteworthy. The diarist's occasional references to deaths, births, weddings, and other such events taking place in Shirdi offer valuable glimpses into the everyday life of the village and into the broader social context within which the routine of Sai Baba's *darbār* unfolded. The fact that Sattrabai and Gopi, the wife and daughter of the deceased, were employed as servants by the Khaparde family further confirms the latter's affluence and elevated social standing.

> Shirdi, Saturday 2 March 1912
>
> I prayed and held our Panchadashi class in the morning. *During it we saw Sayin Maharaj go out.*
> When I went to the Masjid about 11 AM, *he said he was ill and complained of pain in the abdomen.*
> There was a band which played today before the Masjid. It was engaged by a Marwadi for a wedding in his house.
> The midday Arti passed off as usual. Today was Holi. So I invited Bhai, Keshava and Devaji to the midday meal. We had it in a sumptuous style.
> After it, I lay down for a while and then continuing our Panchadashi class we finished the Tripti Deep[410] and commenced Kutastha Deep.[411]
> *We saw Sayin Maharaj at the evening stroll and*, after the Wada Arti, *again at the Shej Arti* which passed off with great ease, *Sayin Baba being in very good humor.*
> Bhishma read Bhagavat and Dasbodh at night. Balasaheb Bhate came for Dasbodh.

During the morning gathering at the mosque, Sai Baba candidly informed Khaparde that "he was ill" and suffering from "pain in the abdomen", yet another indication that his health was deteriorating. Feeling unwell, the *faqīr* appears to have remained withdrawn, interacting only minimally with the people who came to his *darbār*.

The diarist further reports that a wedding was taking place in the house of a local Marwadi, who had engaged a band to play in front of the mosque. Evidently, the Marwadi intended to entertain Sai Baba with the music and perhaps also hoped to obtain the saint's blessings for the bride and groom.

The day was an auspicious one, namely Holī, the popular festival associated with love, colors, and the advent of spring. On this occasion, Khaparde invited several guests to a meal prepared in a "sumptuous style". He may have done so in keeping with Sai Baba's wishes, recalling the latter's encouragement of communal gatherings and the fraternal sharing of food during festive occasions. Yet neither the Holī celebrations nor the lavish banquet prevented Khaparde and his study circle from continuing their careful reading of the *Pañcadaśī*: they completed chapter 7 and commenced chapter 8.

410 Lit. 'The Lamp of Contentment'; it is the seventh chapter of the *Pañcadaśī*.

411 Lit. 'The Lamp of the Immovable'; it is the eighth chapter of the *Pañcadaśī*.

By evening, Sai Baba is reported to have been "in very good humor", and the *śej ārtī* is said to have "passed off with great ease". It may reasonably be surmised that the saint's abdominal pain had subsided and that he was by then feeling somewhat better.

> Shirdi, Sunday 3 March 1912
>
> I attended the Kakad Arti and *Sayin Baba looked pleased* and passed into the Masjid *without any hard words*.
> Abdulla in trying to remove a hanging lamp by accident left it so as to drop to the ground and get shattered. I thought this might anger Sayin Baba but it did not. *He took no notice of it*.
> We held our Panchadashi class and sat in my room as it was very windy in the verandah.
> *We saw Sayin Baba go out and again after he returned*. ***He said that in a former birth I was with him for two or three years and went into royal service though there was enough at home to live in comfort. I wished to learn further particulars but Sayin Saheb would not communicate them.***
> The midday Arti passed off as usual and after the midday meal I lay down for sometime and then continued our Panchadashi class.
> In the evening *we saw Sayin Saheb go out for his stroll* and at night Bhishma had his Bhajan after the Wada Arti.
> Today one Dr. Ranade practicing at Dhulia has come. He says he is related to the Ranade who used to live opposite to Baba Maharaj. He adds that he met me at Sinhagad.
> There is also a Bombay gentleman, Palse by caste, who says he visited me at Amravati, some years ago.

Khaparde records that Sai Baba "looked pleased" during the *kākaḍ ārtī* and that he entered the mosque "without any hard words". One may wonder why the diarist would have expected him to be irritable. As the entries repeatedly indicate, the *faqīr*'s mood, though unpredictable, was generally cheerful. Nevertheless, Sai Baba's occasional outbursts and "hard words" constituted a recurrent feature of his behavior.

The diarist also expresses surprise that the saint did not become angry after his servant Abdulla – probably to be identified with Abdul Baba[412] (d. 1954), a privileged attendant who remained in Sai Baba's company for nearly thirty years, from 1890 until 1918 – broke a hanging lamp inside the *masjid*. According to Khaparde, the *faqīr* "took no notice of it", a detail that may be interpreted as indicating his indifference toward the luxury objects brought by devotees to adorn the mosque. One might even conjecture that, in fidelity to his ideal of poverty, Sai Baba inwardly welcomed the breaking of the lamp.

During the morning gathering at the *masjid*, Sai Baba offered Khaparde several hints concerning one of his former births, stating that the diarist had been "with him for two or three years and went into royal service though there was enough at home to live in comfort". These remarks were evidently intended to draw Khaparde's attention to the deep karmic bond linking the two, a connection to which the *faqīr* had already alluded on 1 January.

412 See Satpathy, *An Inspiring Life*, 94-6.

From the hints given by Sai Baba, one may infer that he and Khaparde had once been closely associated and had lived under the same roof – perhaps as master and disciple, or else as fellow disciples. At a certain point, however, Khaparde appears to have chosen to leave in order to enter "royal service", evidently motivated by worldly ambition. One might suggest that this was analogous to the ambition that, in his present life, led Khaparde to involve himself in politics.[413] It could, however, be argued in his defense that what attracted him to Tilak was not personal ambition or the pursuit of fame, but rather the noble ideals of Indian independence and patriotic service. Indeed, even before entering politics, Khaparde was already a wealthy and successful pleader. Nevertheless, Sai Baba's words contain an implicit criticism, insofar as he emphasizes that there had been no necessity for Khaparde to enter courtly service, since he already possessed sufficient means to live comfortably at home.

As in other narratives recounted by Sai Baba to Khaparde,[414] the protagonist leaves home under the illusion that by doing so he will attain wealth, freedom, and independence. The *faqīr*, however, insists that there is no place better than one's own home and that, sooner or later, one inevitably longs to return to it. Symbolically understood, the return to one's abode and to one's parents signifies the rediscovery of one's true nature and the restoration of communion with God.[415] At home – that is, within one's innermost reality – one already possesses everything necessary to live in fullness and peace; there is therefore no need to wander aimlessly and lose oneself in the world. Yet this, according to Sai Baba's teaching, is precisely the human condition: people often seem destined first to lose themselves before becoming aware of their estrangement and developing a longing for their original abode.[416]

Sai Baba's words may also be read as directly applicable to Khaparde's own predicament. His true and ultimate home is Shirdi, at the feet of Sai, and his desire to leave that abode in order once again to "enter royal service" – this time as the lieutenant of the "king" Tilak – cannot bring him lasting happiness or fulfillment. Only in Sai "Mahārāj", the "supreme king", that is, in God himself, will he finally discover the bliss that he has been seeking across successive lives.

> Shirdi, Monday 4 March 1912
>
> I got up early in the morning, prayed and held our Panchadashi class.
> *We saw Sayin Baba go out* and, about 11 AM, I went to the Masjid as usual. *Sayin Baba was in a very good mood and sat talking but he told no story worth recording.*
> The midday Arti passed off as usual.
> My wife was late in going to worship Sayin Saheb but *he very kindly desisted from his meal and let her worship him.*
> In tha afternoon we continued our Panchadashi class till

413 See http://saiamrithadhara.com/mahabhakthas/dadasaheb_khaparde.html, 8.

414 See Khaparde's diary entry for 24 December 1911.

415 On these issues, see El-Zein, *Return to the Eternal Abode.*

416 Along similar lines is Sai Baba's parable of a boy who repeatedly cried in his eagerness to return to his parents; see Chitluri, *Baba's Vaani,* 133-4. The parable is titled "The Boy Cries Time and Again".

> dark when *we went to see Sayin Baba at his stroll*.
> After the Wada Arti there was the Shej Arti. There was more music than usual and *Sayin Baba was very quiet all through*.
> At night, Bhishma read Bhagavat and Dasbodh. Mr. Bhalasaheb Bhate was present during the reading of the latter.

At the morning gathering at the *masjid*, Khaparde notes that Sai Baba was "in a very good mood" and that he "sat talking but he told no story worth recording". The diarist thus confirms both that the *faqīr* tended to become talkative when in cheerful spirits and that he was accustomed to narrating stories of interest and significance. On this particular occasion, however, Khaparde evidently considered the conversation to constitute an exception to the rule.

Sai Baba was especially fond of Mrs. Khaparde, and the present episode offers yet another illustration of his kindness toward her. It seems reasonable to infer that the incident recounted in the *Shri Sai Satcharita* (chap. 27, vv. 147-68) – describing Sai Baba's affection for her and for her food offerings (*naivedya*), together with his revelation concerning her former births and his instruction that she continue the repetition of "Rājarām" – took place on this very day, even though Khaparde himself makes no mention of it.[417] Although Mrs. Khaparde arrived late to worship the saint, Sai Baba did not reprimand her; rather, he "very kindly desisted from his meal and let her worship him", notwithstanding the rule prohibiting women from entering the *masjid* during the afternoon hours. Clearly, when a devotee's feelings were sincere and imbued with love, the *faqīr* did not object to his or her *pūjā*. Although Sai Baba generally insisted upon punctuality, in Mrs. Khaparde's case he made an exception, permitting her to worship him despite the fact that she had arrived after the completion of the midday *ārtī* and while he was about to take his meal.

Sai Baba's cheerful disposition is further corroborated by the fact that, during the evening *śej ārtī*, although "there was more music than usual", he remained "very quiet all through" and displayed no signs of restlessness. The entire day appears to have been marked by a peaceful (*śānta*) and relaxed atmosphere.

> Shirdi, Tuesday 5 March 1912
>
> I got up so early that I was able to finish my prayer, attend to my morning calls and lie down for about an hour before it was time for Kakad Arti.
> I attended it and then held our Panchadashi class but I felt unwell and we could make no progress. My stomach would appear to be out of order and I had two motions.
> *We saw Sayin Saheb go out* and then went to the Masjid when he returned. *He did not talk much* and the Midday Arti passed off without any incident.
> After meal I lay down and slept long.

417 See Kher, "Shirdi Diary and Mrs. Khaparde", 129-30. On another occasion, Sai Baba scolded Mrs. Lakshmibai for her harsh treatment of a dog, since she failed to recognize his presence in it. We read: "Mrs. G.S. Khaparde when presenting Naivedya at the Mosque was daily inviting Baba to go to her lodgings for a meal. Baba promised; but did not come. One day when she was preparing dishes, a dog came near her and as she viewed it as an unclean and polluting animal, flung burning fuel at the dog and it ran away. That day at Naivedya time at the Mosque: Mrs. G.S. Khaparde – 'Baba, come to my lodgings for a meal'. Baba – 'Yes, when I came, you threw burning fuel at me'" (Narasimhaswami, *Charters and Sayings*, 155).

> Mr. Bapusaheb Jog went with Balasaheb Bhate to Kopargaon to get their pensions and there was therefore no class in the afternoon.
> I was also not well and had motions.
> *I went to see Sayin Maharaj at his evening stroll* and on my return felt so sleepy that I lay down, while yet Bhishma was reading Dasbodh.

Khaparde's diary provides relatively little information for this day, as the diarist was unwell throughout, suffering from recurrent bouts of diarrhoea. He saw Sai Baba going out early in the morning and managed to attend the morning *darbār* at the mosque, during which the *faqīr* "did not talk much". Thereafter, however, he was confined to bed and remained indoors for most of the afternoon. Nevertheless, despite his illness, Khaparde still made the effort to go for *darśan* when the saint emerged for his evening stroll, a detail that attests to the depth of his attachment to Sai Baba. He subsequently felt so weak that he was compelled to return to bed.

> Shirdi, Wednesday 6 March 1912
>
> I slept very sound last night and felt correspondingly better in the morning. After finishing my prayer, we held our Panchadashi class and during it *saw Sayin Saheb go out*. We finished the Kutastha Deep and began the Dhyana Deep.[418] After the class I went to the Masjid as usual and *Sayin Baba happened to be in a very good mood. So I sat serving him.* ***He said he felt as if tied at the waist, chest and near the neck, that he thought nagavalli leaves were put on his eyes, and on opening them to find out what the matter was, he was surprised to see something which he could not understand. He caught a leg of it and then it lay down. He tried to light his fire but the fuel being not quite dry would not ignite. He thought he saw four dead bodies removed and could not understand whose they were. Sayin Saheb kept on speaking in the same strain saying that his left upper and lower jaws were very painful and that he could not even drink water.*** The midday Arti passed off as usual and after the meal I lay down for a while and then sat reading Vakyavritti.[419]
> Later on, we continued our Panchadashi class till dark and then *saw Sayin Saheb at his stroll*.
> After the Wada Arti there was the Shej Arti. The circle of lamp-jets could not be carried in the procession as usual and placed in the little room where Sayin Saheb sleeps. It caused considerable inconvenience and I do not think Sayin Saheb liked it.
> At night Bhishma read Bhagavat and Dasabodh. Balasaheb Bhate attended the reading of the latter.

418 Lit. 'The Lamp of Meditation'; it is the ninth chapter of the *Pañcadaśī*.

419 Attributed to Śaṅkara, the *Vākyavṛtti* is a short treatise of fifty-three verses, cast in the form of a dialogue, on the meaning of two of the *mahāvākya*s ('great sayings') of the *Upaniṣad*s: 'I am *Brahman*' (*ahaṃ brahmāsmi*) from the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1.4.10 and 'That thou art' (*tat tvam asi*) from the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.8.7.

After a good night's sleep, Khaparde felt somewhat better, and he and his companions were able to make substantial progress in their *Pañcadaśī* class. The detail that the diarist began reading the *Vākyavṛtti* further attests to his earnestness as a spiritual seeker. At the morning gathering at the mosque, he found Sai Baba "in a very good mood" and "sat serving him", that is, he was granted the privilege of massaging the *faqīr*'s limbs, especially his legs and feet.

Being inclined to converse, the master narrated to Khaparde a rather strange story combining references to physical ailments – as when he stated that "his left upper and lower jaws were very painful and that he could not even drink water" – with what appears to have been either a nightmare or a visionary experience.[420] The expression "as if tied at the waist, chest and near the neck" suggests a sensation of constriction or suffocation, perhaps associated with anxiety or distress, whereas the *nāgavallī*, or betel leaves, which "he thought were put on his eyes", allude to a well-known remedy for ocular inflammation. The further detail that, upon opening his eyes, "he was surprised to see something which he could not understand", and that "he caught a leg of it and then it lay down", points to some sort of creature that appeared before him and which he was somehow able to immobilize and subdue. Owing to the darkness, however, he was unable to identify it. Although "he tried to light his fire", that is, the *dhunī*, "the fuel being not quite dry would not ignite". In this condition, "he thought he saw four dead bodies removed and could not understand whose they were".

Taken as a whole, the narrative does not readily lend itself to a coherent allegorical interpretation, and it may well be that Sai Baba merely wished to share with Khaparde a disturbing dream or visionary experience he had undergone. Nevertheless, certain elements of the account do appear susceptible to symbolic interpretation. In the first place, Sai Baba seems to imply that curing one's physical sight is insufficient for dispelling darkness, that is, ignorance (*ajñāna*). In order truly to see – namely, to attain knowledge (*jñāna*) – one must "light his fire", that is, turn inward through meditation, just as Sai Baba himself daily contemplated the fire of his *dhunī*. The *faqīr*, however, observes that the fuel was not "quite dry" and therefore "would not ignite". This may suggest that, being in a dream state or altered condition of consciousness, he lacked the requisite qualification – namely, concentrated awareness – necessary to perceive clearly the identity of that "something", perhaps a demonic figure symbolizing ignorance, which appeared before him. Even so, Sai Baba succeeded in seizing one of its legs and subduing it.

One might tentatively interpret the "four dead bodies" as symbolizing the fourfold ego-complex composed of *manas*, *buddhi*, *citta*, and *ahaṃkāra*. Unless one turns inward through meditation and self-contemplation, it is not possible to recognize and transcend this ego-complex. It is described as 'dead' because it is entirely unconscious (*acetana*), belonging to *prakṛti*, or material nature, whereas consciousness properly belongs only to the soul, namely the *ātman* or *puruṣa*. The detail that the four dead bodies appeared to have been removed may further hint at Sai Baba's own spiritual attainment, insofar as the ego-complex had, in his case, been effectively transcended.

420 Though the *faqīr* is traditionally believed to have spent the night awake in the practice of divine remembrance (*dhikr*), the present passage appears instead to describe a bad dream or visionary experience. On Sai Baba as the saint who never slept, see Satpathy, *An Inspiring Life*, 116-17.

Khaparde's observation that, during the evening, "the circle of lamp-jets could not be carried in the procession as usual and placed in the little room where Sayin Saheb sleeps", indicates that the entire ceremony was conducted in semi-darkness, thereby causing "considerable inconvenience". The reason why the lamp-jets could not be employed is not specified. As the diarist suggests, Sai Baba probably disliked the situation, given his fondness for lights and his custom of keeping them burning throughout the night. This absence of light strikingly resonates with the darkness in which the *faqīr* found himself immersed during his nightmare or visionary experience, lending the latter the character of a premonition. Finally, the detail that the saint slept in a small room within the *cāvaḍī* further confirms the austerity of his habits.

> Shirdi, Thursday 7 March 1912
>
> I attended the Kakad Arti. *Sayin Maharaj was in a very pleased mood and danced as he left the Chavadi and went towards the Masjid.*
> We held our Panchadashi class and *saw Sayin Baba going out during it.*
> I went to the Masjid after the class. There was a large crowd. It gradually thinned.
> The midday Arti passed off as usual and after the meal I lay down for a while.
> Bandu went to Rahata for the weekly Bazar.
> In the afternoon, we continued our Panchadashi class. I did the reading and finished the Dhyana Deep.
> *Then I went to see Sayin Saheb at his stroll. He was in a pleased mood.* I returned at sunset.
> At night there was the Wada Arti and Bhishma read Bhagavat, Dasabodh and then did Bhajan during which he sang some verses from Geeta[421] and Panchadashi of Baba Garde.[422] Mr. Balasaheb Bhate was present during the recital of the latter.

From the early morning onward, the saint appears to have been "in a pleased mood" and, as Khaparde had already noted on 31 January, Sai Baba "danced as he left the Chavadi and went towards the Masjid".

The diarist further records that, during the morning *darbār* at the mosque, "there was a large crowd". Although "it gradually thinned", this remark constitutes yet another indication that the number of visitors to Shirdi was steadily increasing.

When Khaparde went to see the *faqīr* during his evening stroll, he once again found him "in a pleased mood". Unfortunately, although it may reasonably be assumed that the saint engaged in several conversations with his guests throughout the day, the diarist does not preserve a single word of what was said.

421 The *Bhagavadgītā*.

422 Apparently the name of the editor or Marāṭhī translator of the *Pañcadaśī*.

> Shirdi, Friday 8 March 1912
>
> In the morning Bhishma and Bandu got up early and had a musical prayer.[423] It was very helpful.
> I prayed and then we had our Panchadashi class. *We saw Sayin Maharaj go out* and later on I went to the Masjid.
> *Sayin Maharaj very kindly called me by name and* ***as soon as I sat down he commenced a tale of his having had four brothers. He said he was very young and very intelligent. He used to play at his house which was very big and also at the Ashur Khana which was close by. Near it used to sit a very old man who would not go either into the Masjid or the Ashur Khana, saying that the place where he lay was his. His people did not wish it but Sayin Baba used to go to the Ashur Khana also and approved of the programme carried out there. The old man turned out to be his mother's father and Sayin Baba always carried to him a bread and something to eat it with. The old man was a leper, lost his fingers and toes, and daily grew worse until at last he refused food and died. Sayin Baba played near him, did not suspect that death was so near and talked about it to his mother who went to see her father. When Sayin Baba went, he found the old man gone and his body converted into rice. Nobody would take charge of the clothes of the old man. Later on the rice disappeared and the old man was born again but associated with Mangs. Sayin Baba gave him food and then the old man was born a third time as the son of Kondaji. The boy played with Sayin Baba and died a few months ago.***
> At the midday Arti, *Sayin Baba approached me and touched my left arm and held his hand waist high just as we do to indicate a young man. With the other hand he made a sign as we do to indicate a man passing away. He made a sign with his eyes.* I did not understand the whole and puzzled over it all day.
> In the afternoon we continued our Panchadashi class, finished Natya Deep and began Brahmanand.[424]
> *We saw Sayin Baba at his stroll* and after the Wada Arti attended the Shej Arti.
> Bhishma finished Bhagavat at night and read Dasbodh.
> Balasaheb Bhate came to it.

Khaparde records that, during the morning *darbār*, Sai Baba "very kindly called him by name", thereby confirming how dear the diarist was to the saint's heart. Being in a congenial mood, the *faqīr* then narrated to him a tale concerning one of his former births.

Sai Baba recounts that, in that former life, he was "very young and very intelligent", had four brothers, and lived in a "very big house", from which one may infer that he belonged to a prosperous family. As a young boy, he spent much of his time playing both at home and at a nearby *ashurkhana*, a hall in which Shīʿī Muslims gather for mourning rituals and other ceremonies commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Ḥusayn during Muḥarram.[425] Although "his people" did not want him to frequent the *ashurkhana*, Sai Baba continued to go there because he "approved of the programme carried

423 The chanting of *mantra*s or devotional hymns with musical accompaniment.

424 These are chapters ten and eleven of the *Pañcadaśī*, known as the 'Lamp of the Theater' and the 'Bliss of *Brahman*' respectively.

425 Among Sunnī Muslims in South Asia, such a place may be known as a *takya*.

out there", a detail suggesting that he already possessed a marked religious inclination. Near the building there sat "a very old man", who maintained that "the place where he lay was his" and who "would not go either into the *masjid* or the *ashurkhana*".

At a certain point, Sai Baba discovered that this old man was none other than his grandfather, "his mother's father", to whom he "always carried a bread and something to eat it with", thereby demonstrating his affectionate concern. These sentiments of compassion appear to have characterized him from an early age, whereas neither his mother nor his four elder brothers showed any care for the old man. In particular, the latter is said to have been afflicted with leprosy, a condition that rendered him especially repulsive in the eyes of society. His situation was therefore tragic, since he was shunned by everyone – including his own family – out of disgust and fear of contagion. Sai Baba constituted the sole exception: his daily care for the old man, even after he "lost his fingers and toes", is especially noteworthy.

Unfortunately, the old man "daily grew worse until at last he refused food and died". Sai Baba, who used to play near him without fearing contamination, had evidently not realized how imminent his grandfather's death was, and when it occurred he immediately informed his mother, who then came to see the corpse. The solitude in which the old man had lived may be inferred from the detail that "nobody would take charge of his clothes". The statement that the dead body was "converted into rice" may perhaps constitute an oblique allusion to the traditional offering of *piṇḍa*s, the balls of cooked rice mixed with ghee and black sesame seeds employed in Hindu funerary rites. If so, this would imply that Sai Baba's grandfather was in fact a Hindu rather than a Muslim, which may explain why he "would not go either into the *masjid* or the *ashurkhana*".

One might tentatively interpret the disappearance of the rice as coinciding symbolically with the old man's rebirth in the Māṅg caste, one of the lowest among the untouchable communities of Maharashtra. Even after this rebirth, Sai Baba continued to stay close to him and to provide him with food. Finally, when the same individual was reborn a third time "as the son of Kondaji", namely the local Kondaji Fakir, the saint affectionately played with him until his sudden death "a few months ago". It should be noted that Kondaji Fakir had also lost his daughter on 25 December 1911, as Khaparde duly records in his diary.

Taken as a whole, this narrative confirms several of Sai Baba's fundamental teachings. Above all, it emphasizes the importance of rendering compassionate service to all, especially to the sick and destitute, irrespective of caste or religious affiliation and with complete disregard for conventional notions of purity and pollution. Just as, in one of his former lives, he cared for the old leper, so too in Shirdi Sai Baba is known to have cherished the company of the leper Bhagoji Shinde,[426] one of his personal attendants, to whom he granted the privilege of holding the ceremonial umbrella over his head during processions. Furthermore, the *faqīr*'s habit of affectionately playing with the child in his subsequent incarnation illustrates the universality of his love, which embraced both the old and the young. Indeed, at the mosque Sai Baba was constantly surrounded by children.

426 See Shepherd, *Faqir of Shirdi*, 69-70, 121-2.

The story likewise underscores the significance of karmic ties (*ṛṇānubandha*) extending across successive lives.[427] The *faqīr* is effectively telling his devotees that his closeness to particular individuals in the present life was not accidental, but rather the consequence of karmic bonds rooted in previous births. Across repeated incarnations, one's caste and religious affiliation continually change, thereby demonstrating that such identities are far less substantial than people generally imagine. Whether one was Hindu or Muslim, Shīʿī or Sunnī, Brahmin or Māṅg, or belonged to a higher or lower *varṇa* or *jāti*, was never of ultimate importance in Sai Baba's eyes. What truly mattered to him was selfless love and the dismantling of the barriers human beings erect in order to separate themselves from others.

During the midday *ārtī*, Sai Baba approached Khaparde and made gestures with his hands and signs with his eyes that the diarist could not understand and over which he continued to puzzle throughout the day. As already noted, the *faqīr* would often make enigmatic gestures without offering any explanation, evidently wishing the person to whom they were directed to reflect upon their meaning and make a sincere effort to decipher them. From Khaparde's description that the saint "touched my left arm and held his hand waist high just as we do to indicate a young man", while with the other hand he "made a sign as we do to indicate a man passing away", it is possible that Sai Baba was alluding to someone's death. Perhaps he intended to emphasize the conclusion of the story he had narrated earlier that morning concerning the premature death of Kondaji Fakir's son.

> Shirdi, Saturday 9 March 1912
>
> In the morning I attended the Kakad Arti. *Sayin Saheb appeared to be in very good mood. He blessed as usual, by saying that God was higher than all. Then he passed away into the Masjid.*
> I returned, prayed and was making ready for the Panchadashi class when Dhanjisha arrived from Bombay. He brought very good fruit for Sayin Saheb. We sat talking and *saw Sayin Saheb as he went out.*
> We held our class but did not make much progress.
> I went to the Masjid as usual. *Sayin Saheb* ***told the history of two sparrows that were sitting in the niche on the southern side of the "Nimbar".***[428] ***He said the sparrows built their nest there and used to sit as they were sitting at the moment. Death overtook them. It came in the form of a serpent, which crawled round the "Nimbar" and swallowed them up. The sparrows are born again now and have built their nest again exactly where it was before and are sitting once more as they used to do. He said he never touched them, nor ever spoke to them.***
> *He accepted Dhanjisha's Puja and allowed the garland to remain on him much longer than he ever does. He liked the flowers and ate a few grapes.* Dhanjisha is of course staying with me.

427 On these issues, see Chitluri, *Baba's Rinanubandh*.

428 A niche in the western wall of the mosque oriented toward Mecca, in whose direction Muslims perform their prayers (*namāz*). Devotees used to garland it daily; see Williams, *Experiencing Sai Baba's Shirdi*, 42-3.

> After meals I lay down for a while and then we held our class or rather continued it. We enjoyed the portion very much. At sunset we went and *saw Sayin Maharaj at his stroll. He was in a pleased mood but said that he did not care for buntings, etc. but he wanted men.*
> At night Bhishma read Swanubhava Dinkar[429] and Dasbodh. Balasaheb Bhate also came. There was also Bhajan.

Khaparde writes that at the *kākaḍ ārtī* Sai Baba "appeared to be in very good mood" and that "he blessed as usual, by saying that God was higher than all". As noted above, we may infer that the *faqīr*'s original words were either Allāh Akbar or his favorite formula, Allāh Mālik. The diarist specifies that this was Sai Baba's customary mode of blessing people, thereby reminding everyone of God's greatness and absolute sovereignty.

During the morning gathering at the mosque, Sai Baba narrated the story of two sparrows that were sitting "in the niche on the southern side of the 'Nimbar'". As always, the diarist recorded what he perceived to be the essential substance of the narrative, though the *faqīr*'s account was no doubt considerably more elaborate. The fact that Sai Baba recounted the previous life of two birds should not surprise us, for in doing so he underscored that *ṛṇānubandha* and the law of *karman* are universal realities affecting every creature, great or small. Sai Baba repeatedly emphasized the underlying unity and sacredness of life – from a tiny insect to a mighty elephant.

Particularly noteworthy is the detail that the sparrows built their nest in precisely the same spot where they had nested in their previous life, before they were swallowed by a snake. This may be intended to illustrate the power of habits and latent dispositions, that is, of one's *saṃskāra*s, which shape the karmic trajectory of all beings from life to life. Sai Baba's statement that he "never touched them, nor ever spoke to them" probably serves to emphasize that he would not interfere with nature or with the allotted destiny of these small creatures, that is, with God's dispensation.

This story recalls the words of Jesus in *Matthew* 10:29-31: "Are not sparrows two a penny? Yet without your Father's leave not one of them can fall to the ground. As for you, even the hairs of your head have all been counted. So have no fear; you are worth more than any number of sparrows".[430] From their respective perspectives, both Jesus and Sai Baba stress God's loving care for creation. If God cares even for seemingly insignificant birds, how much more must human beings and their destiny matter in the divine order?[431]

On the same day the diarist also records the arrival in Shirdi of one Mr. Dhanjisha from Bombay. Khaparde knew him well and invited him to stay at his lodging. A handwritten address preserved in Khaparde's papers appears to give his name as "Dhanjisha Shapurji" and places him at Karanjia Daruwala's House, opposite the Dadiseth Fire Temple, Fanaswadi, Bombay. The latter can be identified with the Dadiseth Atash Behram, one of Bombay's principal Parsi fire temples. He may be identified with the Parsi Dhanjisha

429 The *Svānubhavadinkar* was composed in 1694 by Dinkar Gosāvī of the Tisgāv *maṭha*, belonging to the lineage of Rāmdās. It is a philosophical work of a high order, situated within the *advaitabhakti* tradition of Jñāndev while stylistically reflecting the influence of Rāmdās.

430 *The New English Bible: New Testament*, 18. See also *Luke* 12:6-7.

431 In Sufi circles, birds are often held in high regard; their singing is sometimes interpreted as a form of *dhikr*, the recollection of Allāh's names.

Shapurji Doongaji, whose death on 29 June 1926 was reported in the *Times of India*, although the identification remains tentative.

The fact that Sai Baba accepted the individual *pūjā* offered by this eminent Parsi devotee is significant. Khaparde carefully notes that Sai Baba appreciated his offerings – flowers and grapes, of which he tasted some – and that he "allowed the garland to remain on him much longer than he ever does". Sai Baba rarely continued to wear the garlands offered by devotees; when he did so, it was generally as a mark of recognition for the sincere and heartfelt devotion of his followers.

Equally eloquent is the remark the saint made during his stroll at sunset. Observing the flags and festive decorations that devotees had hung near the mosque, the *faqīr*, who remained "in a pleased mood", remarked that "he did not care for buntings, etc. but he wanted men". The implication seems clear: he had little regard for outward displays of devotion. What he truly valued was an inner, heart-to-heart bond with his disciples.

> Shirdi, Sunday 10 March 1912
>
> I got up early in the morning, prayed and held our Panchadashi class as usual.
> Mr. Waman Rao Pitale whose father served at Baroda went away today with his wife, after a stay of a day, and requested me particularly to be mentioned to Mr. Dixit on the return of the latter.
> *We saw Sayin Baba go out* and I went to the Masjid on his return. *He addressed me by name and* ***said that his father was very rich, had money buried in all imaginable places. Once he had a little difference with his father when he was very young and went away to a place. It was a broad and thick cactus hedge and he found a large treasure underground there. Sayin Saheb sat on it and became converted into a big cobra. He sat on for some time and then felt inclined to go away. So he moved away to a neighboring village and on the way regained his human form. Then he went to a lane where they killed men. He wandered there but was left unhurt. Then he went about begging and brought all the treasure trove in.***
> The midday Arti passed off as usual and when I was returning he said: "*Look here, be careful. Some guests will come; do not admit them*", all which meant that I shall have some disturbing influences and I should withstand them.
> After the midday meal I lay down for a while and then got a letter from Annasaheb Mutalik saying that Uma has become a lady. There is the religious and the social ceremony to be performed which means expense.
> Narayan Kamaukar writes from Amravati to say that they are all very hard pressed for money on all sides, so I understand the necessity of the warning given by Sayin Saheb.
> In the afternoon we continued our class and towards evening *went to see Sayin Saheb at his stroll.*
> At night there was the Wada Arti and then the Shej Arti. The circle of fire fell and broke today. Balasaheb Bhate came at night as usual.

At the morning gathering at the mosque, Sai Baba affectionately called the diarist by name and narrated an autobiographical story rich in symbolism, so much so that it may be read as an extended allegory. The *faqīr* relates that his father – who may be understood as Allāh – was exceedingly wealthy, possessing "money buried in all imaginable places". Such prosperity symbolizes God's sovereignty over His kingdom, namely the world filled with His hidden riches. The fact that Sai Baba, while still "very young", "had a little difference with his father" and therefore "went away to a place", is a recurrent motif in the *faqīr*'s narratives. It suggests a distancing from one's true abode and father, that is, from God, followed by a struggle in the world that culminates in the attainment of maturity and wisdom and ultimately leads to self-realization and a return to the Divine.

Sai Baba goes on to say that he passed through "a broad and thick cactus hedge", where he discovered "a large treasure underground". The cactus hedge may be interpreted as symbolizing a trial of endurance within a harsh and arid environment representative of *saṃsāra*. It is precisely the young Sai Baba's perseverance that inspires him to dig beneath that spot and uncover a subterranean treasure. The hedge may thus be understood as representing the hardships of worldly existence,[432] beneath which lies the hidden treasure trove of spiritual wisdom.

The detail that Sai Baba "sat on it for some time" – an apparent allusion to prolonged meditative absorption – and that he was transformed "into a big cobra" can readily be understood in light of Hindu mythology. In Hindu lore, Nāgas, divine or semidivine serpentine beings often represented as cobras, are believed to inhabit subterranean realms and to serve as guardians of marvelous jewels and hidden treasures. Here once again appears the motif of Sai Baba's temporary transformation into a divine serpent. When he eventually decided to leave that place – having fully assimilated the treasure, that is, sacred wisdom – and proceed to a neighboring village, symbolizing his reentry into human society, "on the way he regained his human form".

The statement that Sai Baba "went to a lane where they killed men" and "wandered there but was left unhurt" should be understood as referring to an initiatory ordeal through which he had to pass in order to demonstrate that he had fully interiorized spiritual wisdom. By that stage, he had already "brought all the treasure trove in". He therefore had to confront the ultimate trial – the terror of violence and death – and he emerged from it unharmed. Having thus demonstrated his spiritual attainment, he became free to move wherever he wished. In other words, he realized that every place constituted his own abode, since all places belonged equally to his omnipresent divine Father. From that point onward, he "went about begging", an indication of his spiritual eminence. As Sai Baba himself used to say:

> Poverty is highest riches and is a thousand times superior to a lord's position. God is the brother of the poor. Fakir is the real emperor. Fakirship does not perish, but empire is soon lost.[433]

432 Cacti survive in arid environments by storing water in their fleshy stems through specialized tissues that minimize evaporation.

433 Narasimhaswami, *Charters and Sayings*, 105.

Although the narrative may preserve autobiographical reminiscences – whether from Sai Baba's early life or from one of his previous births – it ultimately functions as an allegory that extols spiritual wisdom as the supreme treasure, embodied in the *faqīr*'s exemplary life of renunciation and detachment.

After the midday *ārtī*, Sai Baba warned Khaparde, telling him: "Look here, be careful. Some guests will come; do not admit them". The diarist interpreted these words as referring to certain "disturbing influences" that he would soon have to confront and withstand. In particular, he associated the *faqīr*'s warning with alarming news received from his law office in Amravati, where everyone was reportedly "very hard pressed for money on all sides". This constitutes yet another indication of the difficult financial circumstances in which Khaparde found himself. Even his remark concerning Mutalik's letter – namely that the religious and social ceremony for Uma, a relative of his, "means expense" – confirms the economic strain under which he was living.

> Shirdi, Monday 11 March 1912
>
> The Kakad Arti is done in a musical way and the lamps are waved by all. This morning the Kakad Arti was done in this way. *Sayin Saheb appeared very much pleased, used no hard words and* ***said that his father and mother were there****. He also told us to go to the Wada.*
> On my return I prayed and held our Panchadashi class.
> The midday Arti passed off as usual and I lay down after meal and in the afternoon continued our Panchadashi class.
> Towards evening *we saw Sayin Saheb at his stroll. He was in a pleased mood.*
> There was the Wada Arti and Bhishma read Swanubhava Dinkar and Dasbodh and there was Bhajan afterwards.

The innovation on this occasion – namely, that the *kākaḍ ārtī* was performed "in a musical way" and that the lamps were "waved by all" – may have been connected with the fact that on the previous day "the circle of fire", that is, the ritual implement used by the appointed Brahmin priest during the *ārtī* ceremony, had been broken.

After the *kākaḍ ārtī*, Sai Baba once again appeared to be in a very good mood and "used no hard words", that is, he refrained from his habit of uttering harsh reproaches. Particularly intriguing is Khaparde's annotation that the *faqīr* declared that "his father and mother were there". This statement may be interpreted in several ways. Sai Baba may have meant that his parents were spiritually present; alternatively, he may have implied that they were physically present, having been reborn among his devotees and subsequently summoned into his presence. Among these possibilities, the latter interpretation may perhaps be regarded as the more probable. It may also be conjectured that by "father and mother" Sai Baba was referring symbolically to two of his closest disciples, toward whom he felt particular affection. In this regard, one is reminded of Jesus' saying in *Matthew* 12:48-50: "'Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?' And, pointing to his

disciples, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers. Whoever does the will of my heavenly Father is my brother, my sister, my mother'".[434]

Another possibility is that Sai Baba employed the expression symbolically: by "father" he may have meant the supreme *Brahman*, and by "mother", *māyā*, the cosmic power of illusion. Indeed, he is reported elsewhere to have said:

> I got embroiled by Karma, and came to a body. (So) I got a name and abode. Dehi, i.e. the embodied, is my name; and the world is my abode. Brahman is my father and Maya, my mother. As they interlocked, I got this body. The world is evanescent, mutable.[435]

The detail that, early in the morning, Sai Baba asked Khaparde and the others gathered at the mosque to "go to the Wada" clearly indicates that he wished to be left alone. Apparently, however, his good humor remained entirely unaffected, for the diarist notes that even during his evening stroll the *faqīr* continued to be "in a pleased mood".

> Shirdi, Tuesday 12 March 1912
>
> As I finished my prayer in the morning, news came that Nanasaheb Chandorkar was to arrive today.
> We held our Panchadashi class and finished the work today.
> We had two pomegranates in honor of finishing the book.
> *We saw Sayin Maharaj go out.*
> *I went to see him after he returned to the Masjid. As I sat down Sayin Saheb said, "People are very ignorant. When they do not see my physical body, they think I am absent". He then said that he thought of Pimpalgaon this morning. Then met four men from it and they followed him to the Masjid. The conversation somehow turned to topics connected with weddings and Sayin Saheb* ***pointing to the new wall that is being built said that there used to be a passage there and a nim tree. An old man sat there and he was very pious. He had come from Jalna and did not care to return for over twelve years though his brother and family suffered very much during his absence. At last he was prevailed upon to return. He did so on horseback and Sayin Saheb accompanied him in a cart. Arrived at Jalna, the old man stayed with his wife and four grown up sons that he had, and then suddenly decided to marry the daughter of his brother. The wedding took place though everyone laughed it to scorn. The bride was very young. At last she grew up and the old man had a son by her. Then the old man died when his son grew to six years of age. The boy was poisoned by Biradars. The young widow and bereaved mother spent a chaste life, never remarried and eventually died. The boy was born again as Babu and died and is now born again in Bombay. Such is the artistic work of God.***
> During the midday Arti, Nanasaheb Chandorkar's family arrived and he followed soon after. He had a feast and all in the two Wadas were invited. It was nearly 5 PM when we finished. Baba Palekar came with Nanasaheb. He came from

434 *The New English Bible: New Testament*, 23.

435 Narasimhaswami, *Charters and Sayings*, 10.

> Amravati and is staying with me. I naturally sat talking with him. My people are very badly off.
> *I attended the evening stroll of Sayin Saheb.*
> Mr. Nanasaheb Chandorkar went with his family after the Wada Arti. After seeing him off, I and Balasaheb Bhate attended the Shej Arti at the Chavadi.
> At night, a Haridasi[436] who happened to be here did Kirtan telling a tale. The Haridasi is from Bhusawal.

After celebrating the completion of the reading of the *Pañcadaśī* with the auspicious consumption of pomegranates, symbols of prosperity, Khaparde went to see Sai Baba at his morning *darbār* at the mosque. There, as soon as he sat down, the *faqīr* exclaimed: "People are very ignorant. When they do not see my physical body, they think I am absent". This is a particularly noteworthy statement, for by it Sai Baba appears to affirm his omnipresence. The sources report that on several occasions he described himself as "formless and everywhere" and declared that "he lived in Shirdi and everywhere".[437] Moreover, he is reported elsewhere to have said:

> I am in Gangapur, Pandharpur[438] and in all places. I am in every bit of the globe. All the universe is in me. […] I am in everything. I am in everything and beyond. I fill all space. All that you see taken together is Myself. I do not shake or move. All that is seen is my form: ant, fly, prince, pauper. I am in the water, in dry places, in woods, amidst crowds, and in the solitary wilderness. I am in the fire and in ether. I am not limited to any place.[439]

During a conversation concerning matters "connected with weddings", which Sai Baba held with four men from the village of Pimpalgaon in Nasik District – a subject about which he had apparently been thinking even before their arrival – the saint narrated the story of a "very pious old man" from the town of Jalna, situated approximately 170 kilometers from Shirdi, who used to sit near the *masjid*. Pointing to a wall then under construction, Sai Baba remarked that "there used to be a passage there and a nim tree", beneath which this man, most probably a Muslim, would sit. He remained in Shirdi "for over twelve years" – a considerable length of time, the number twelve often symbolizing completeness or the completion of a cycle – without caring to return to his wife, four sons, and brother, all of whom suffered greatly because of his absence.

Eventually, the old man was persuaded to return to his hometown – most likely through Sai Baba's intervention – and the saint himself "accompanied him in a cart". In other words, Sai Baba brought him back to his responsibilities and to his proper *dharma*, namely the care and maintenance of his wife and children. Piety, the story suggests, must begin at home.

436 A follower of the Haridāsī tradition, founded by the 16th-century *bhakti* poet Haridās, a devotee of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. The principal pilgrimage center of the Haridāsīs is the sacred site of Vṛndāvana.

437 Narasimhaswami, *Charters and Sayings*, 4, 10.

438 The most important pilgrimage center of Maharashtra, Pandharpur is the sacred abode of the god Viṭṭhala, also known as Viṭhobā or Pāṇḍuraṅga. Devotees frequently identify Shirdi with Pandharpur, as expressed in the daily *ārtī* refrain "Shirdi mājhe Pandharpur" ("Shirdi is my Pandharpur"). On Pandharpur and the cult of Viṭṭhala, see Sand, "Pandharpur and Vitthal".

439 Narasimhaswami, *Charters and Sayings*, 11.

As frequently occurs in these narratives, it remains unclear whether Sai Baba was referring to events from his present life or from a former existence; in the latter case, the account would further strengthen the notion of his longstanding connection with Shirdi. What follows concerns events that allegedly took place in Jalna, and again it is uncertain whether Sai Baba was describing occurrences he had personally witnessed. In any event, once the old man had returned home, instead of caring for his family he suddenly decided to abandon them and marry his brother's "very young daughter". Sai Baba's observation that everyone "laughed this marriage to scorn" implies that the old man had been overcome by lust, thereby illustrating how the cravings of sensual desire remain powerful even in advanced age. His inability to restrain sensual desire ultimately led to his downfall, compounded by the shameful neglect of his first wife and four children over a period of more than twelve years.

Although he fathered a son through his new marriage, the old man died when the child was only six years old. A tragic destiny awaited both the boy and his young mother. The former was poisoned by certain Biradars,[440] a clan of South Asian Muslims, while the "young widow and bereaved mother spent a chaste life, never remarried and eventually died".

The moral of the tale is that when selfishness and sensual desire (*kāma*) are left unchecked, they inevitably lead to ruin, and their negative karmic consequences extend to all those involved. Sai Baba further remarked that the boy was reborn as Babu. He may possibly be identified with the nephew of Dada Kelkar, regarding whom Khaparde had written in his diary entry of 7 December 1911 that he had died and that Sai Baba had declared him reborn in Bombay as the son of Moreshwar Vishwanath Pradhan. The *faqīr*'s concluding words – "such is the artistic work of God" – emphasize the idea that every human being is a work of divine artistry: despite their sins and errors, all remain within the scope of God's providential design and ultimate judgment.

The fact that Nanasaheb Chandorkar visited Sai Baba today together with his family and organized a large communal meal to which "all in the two Wadas" were invited further confirms both his generosity and the important role he played within the saint's circle of devotees. Khaparde notes that Baba Palekar from Amravati, a junior advocate employed in his office, arrived together with Nanasaheb. Palekar stayed at Khaparde's lodging, and the news he brought confirmed that the latter's financial situation had become critical and that his associates were "very badly off". Baba Palekar was probably one of the "guests" Sai Baba had in mind when, two days earlier, he warned Khaparde that some visitors would come to see him. The instruction that he should "not admit them" may therefore be understood as an exhortation not to allow their discouraging news to overwhelm him. Sai Baba remained at his side to guide and protect him, and Khaparde was expected to maintain faith that his difficulties would ultimately be resolved.

440 The term derives from Persian *birādar* ('brother') and denotes a kinship group or brotherhood.

> Shirdi, Wednesday 13 March 1912
>
> I attended the Kakad Arti and *Sayin Saheb appeared very much pleased*.
> Mr. Dixit returned about 9 AM. He has come alone leaving his wife behind. We sat talking and could not hold our Panchadashi class. Strangely enough I felt sleepy and lay down.
> *We saw Sayin Maharaj go out and saw him later at the Masjid*. ***He told a long story which in substance was that an old Patil used to visit him, that four and afterwards as many as twelve Govindas (Detectives) used to watch him, that the old man and the Govindas had hard words and once had a serious scuffle. Sayin Saheb favored the old man, visited him in his field and on one occasion hit the Govindas when they attacked him. At last the old man was removed to a large town for being dealt with, that Sayin Saheb intervened and got him released.***
> *Baba Palekar got permission to take me away*, either tomorrow or the day after.
> We held our class in the afternoon and *saw Sayin Saheb at his evening stroll*.
> At night there was Ramayan, Swanubhava Dinkar and Bhajan.

Once again, Khaparde informs us that in the early morning Sai Baba appeared to be "very much pleased", possibly because he knew that Allāh had answered his prayers and that the diarist would soon be able to return to his hometown and resume his professional activities without fear of arrest or prosecution by the British authorities. The *faqīr* clearly regarded the protection of his devotees as one of his primary responsibilities. As he is reported to have said:

> If one perpetually thinks of me, and makes me his sole refuge, I am his debtor and will give my head to save him. […] I am (*bhaktaparadeena*) the bond slave of my devotee. I love devotion. […] I will not allow my devotees to come to harm. I have to take thought for my devotees. And if a devotee is about to fall, I stretch out my hands, and thus with four outstretched hands at a time support him. I will not let him fall.[441]

The "long story" narrated by Sai Baba during the morning gathering at the mosque was clearly intended for Khaparde, although the diarist unfortunately condensed it into only a few lines. The "old Patil", that is, the respected landowner or influential village elder who used to visit Sai Baba, appears to represent Khaparde himself – or perhaps even Bal Gangadhar Tilak, who was to visit the saint a few years later – whereas the Govindas who watched him – four initially and later "as many as twelve", the number twelve often symbolizing completeness or totality – are to be identified with British intelligence agents.[442]

Khaparde notes parenthetically that 'Govindas' means 'detectives', though it remains unclear whether he himself inferred this equivalence

441 Narasimhaswami, *Charters and Sayings*, 2-3, 5.

442 On Sai Baba's use of the term *govinda*s to denote detectives or government informers, see Satpathy, *New Findings*, 53-71.

or whether Sai Baba explicitly explained it to him and to the assembled audience, the latter possibility appearing more likely. Govinda, literally 'finder' or 'protector of cows', is one of the most celebrated epithets of Kṛṣṇa as divine herdsman. Here, however, Sai Baba appears to reinterpret the term creatively: *go* is understood not as 'cow' but as 'man', while *vinda*, derived from the verbal root *vid*, 'to find' or 'to discover', yields the meaning 'finder' or 'discoverer'. Thus *govinda* is interpreted in the sense of a 'finder of men', that is, a detective.

The observation that the *pāṭīl* and the *govinda*s "had hard words and once had a serious scuffle" clearly indicates mutual hostility and opposition. Sai Baba, however, favored the *pāṭīl*, and the statement that he "visited him in his field and on one occasion hit the Govindas when they attacked him" demonstrates that he sided with him and acted as his protector. The twelve detectives wished to harm the old *pāṭīl*, but Sai Baba intervened in his defense. The detail that the saint "visited him in his field" (*kṣetra*) may allude symbolically to his protective presence in Amravati – namely in Khaparde's home and legal office – and, more broadly, wherever he happened to be.

Finally, the remark that "the old man was removed to a large town for being dealt with" and that Sai Baba "intervened and got him released" may hint at the possibility that Khaparde feared being taken to Bombay or Delhi by the British authorities – something that never actually occurred, though it may well have been contemplated by them – and that the *faqīr* successfully protected him from such dangers. At the same time, this final detail seems in some respects to fit Tilak's case even more closely than Khaparde's, suggesting that the two figures may here be symbolically conflated. It may allude to Tilak's deportation to Mandalay and to his eventual release, interpreted retrospectively as having occurred through Sai Baba's intervention.

Particularly significant is the diarist's concluding remark that Baba Palekar received permission to take him back to Amravati "either tomorrow or the day after". Khaparde's hopes were therefore rekindled, though he remained cautious, knowing well that Sai Baba's "tomorrow" and "day after" did not necessarily correspond to ordinary chronological time.

Kevin R.D. Shepherd's observations concerning Khaparde's prolonged 'detention' in Shirdi are particularly relevant in this regard:

> The prolonged stay [of Khaparde] at Shirdi resulted in rumours, spreading to Bombay and other places, that Khaparde had become mentally unbalanced in his obsession with the eccentric *faqir* Sai Baba. He had given up his practice as a lawyer, thereby losing substantial income. His political career had apparently ceased. The British Government accordingly decided not to proceed with prosecution to Khaparde.[443]

443 Shepherd, *Faqir of Shirdi*, 125. See also `http://saiamrithadhara.com/mahabhakthas/dadasaheb_khaparde.html`, 6.

Shirdi, Thursday 14 March 1912

I got up early, prayed and held our Panchadashi class. We revised a few of the earlier verses of the first Viveka.[444] *We saw Sayin Saheb go out* and I went later to the Masjid on his return. *Baba Palekar went before and obtained permission for me to return to* Amravati, tomorrow. The exact hour of starting appears unsettled.
The midday Arti passed off as usual and after the midday meal I lay down for sometime.
From Satara has come a Shastri to formally announce the news of the puberty of L. Sanshagyavati Uma.[445] *He also saw Sayin Saheb.*
In the afternoon we continued our class and towards evening *saw Sayin Maharaj at his stroll.*
At night there was the Wada Arti and later on the Shej Arti. I attended both.
Then Bhishma read a little of Swanubhava Dinkar and Dasbodh.

Apparently, this was a rather uneventful day, and in any case the sources provide no information concerning what the *faqīr* did or said. The diarist attended the *Pañcadaśī* class both in the morning and in the afternoon, had Sai Baba's *darśan*s, and otherwise followed the customary routine of the place. Although Khaparde's words betray little emotion, it may safely be assumed that he was deeply relieved and delighted at the prospect of finally returning home.

Shirdi - Bhusawal, Friday 15 March 1912

I got up early in the morning, prayed and attended the Kakad Arti. *Sayin Baba got up pleased and passed to the Masjid with good* […].[446]
The Rohilla was today in a bellicose mood and I heard afterwards that he beat and broke the […][447] of Butya.
I went to the Masjid with Baba Palekar and Mr. Dixit. *Sayin Baba was pacifying the Rohilla and Butya. After he sat in his usual place, Dixit broached the topic of my permission to return to Amravati and it was granted.* So I returned and told my wife to make ready for my departure. She, however, will stay a few days longer, with Bhishma and Bandu.
I held the Panchadashi class and finished the first chapter of it.
Then I attended the midday Arti which passed off as usual.
Mr. Chandorkar arrived before it and naturally attended.
I had my meals in company with Dixit, Chandorkar and others.
After the meal, I went with Palekar and *met Sayin Saheb near the gate of the village. At his bidding, we ran back and brought some udī and took it from his hands. He told us to start at once, blessing our journey with the words "Allah bhala karega".*
So I hastily said goodbye to Bhate, Joshi, Dada Kelkar, Mr.

444 The first five chapters of the text are collectively known as the *Vivekapañcaka*. Chapter 1, titled *Tattvaviveka,* concerns the discriminative knowledge (*viveka*) of Ultimate Reality (*tattva*).

445 She appears to be identical with the Uma mentioned in the entry of 10 March. *Sanshagyavati* is evidently a corrupt form of *saubhāgyavatī,* a traditional honorific used in addressing married women.

446 The final word is unclear in the original manuscript, but may possibly read "words".

447 The word is illegible in the original manuscript.

> Chandorkar, Upasani, Durgabau, Mrs. Kaulgi and Bapusaheb caught me up soon. Balaram and young Dixit as well as Ramchandra were there. Bhai and Keshava could not be found. We, i.e. I and Palekar, left by Tonga, reached Kopargaon at about 4 PM or a little later and sat on the platform till 7 PM. Many visitors of Shirdi including Navalkar and Dr. Ujinky turned up there and we sat talking.
> We left by the train which leaves about 7 PM and reached Manmad. There the N[orth] W[estern] passenger [train] was waiting. So I got into it telling Palekar to take tickets and get in. The train started soon and I discovered afterwards that he did not get in. There was a Traffic Inspector in my compartment. I told him all. He advised me to go on to Bhusawal and wait for Palekar there. So I did. I am now waiting and have neither a ticket nor a single pie. The Traffic Inspector is a good man but he got down at Jalgaon. I met Mr. Devale who is a ticket collector here. He advised me to wait either on the platform or in the train for Nagpur which is already formed. I decided to do the latter.

This was Khaparde's last day in Shirdi, and once again he notes that in the early morning Sai Baba "got up pleased". We are informed that during the morning gathering at the mosque the saint pacified both a Rohilla – who was "in a bellicose mood" – and one Butya, probably to be identified with the wealthy Brahmin Gopalrao Mukund Buti. Sai Baba consistently sought to promote harmony between Muslims and Hindus and insisted that all forms of violence should be avoided.

At one point, while Khaparde was at the mosque together with his friend and fellow attorney Baba Palekar, Mr. Dixit, speaking on his behalf, asked whether Khaparde had truly received permission to return to his hometown. The *faqīr* confirmed that the permission "was granted". Accordingly, when the diarist returned to his lodging, he instructed his wife Lakshmibai "to make ready for his departure" and assist him in packing, while she herself decided to remain in Shirdi "a few days longer" together with Bhishma and Bandu. Those "few days" in fact extended to approximately another month. On 14 April, Khaparde recorded receiving a telegram announcing her return the following morning, and on 15 April he noted that she, Bandu, and Bhishma had arrived from Shirdi at about 4 AM, after which he spent some time speaking with them and making inquiries about Sai Baba and other Shirdi residents.[448] Since Lakshmibai had already been staying in Shirdi by early November 1911, her presence there thus extended both before and after her husband's prolonged stay, providing a further indication of the depth of her own devotion to Sai Baba.

Particularly moving is the report that, shortly after lunch, Khaparde and Palekar went to meet Sai Baba "near the gate of the village" and that, "at his bidding", they ran back to the village in order to bring him the sacred ash of the *dhunī*, so that they might receive it "from his hands" together with his blessings. The *faqīr* instructed them to depart immediately and blessed them with the words *Allāh bhalā karegā*, meaning 'Allāh will do well [to you]'. The haste surrounding the departure may conceal both Khaparde's emotion and that of the saint at the prospect of separation. Nevertheless,

448 National Archives of India, New Delhi, *Diaries of G.S. Khaparde*, 14-15 April 1912, Microfilm Repository, Identifier: MF_222400056291.

at Sai Baba's command Khaparde hurried to bid farewell to his friends and fellow devotees, and shortly thereafter he and Baba Palekar departed from Shirdi in a two-wheeled cart. They soon reached the railway station at the nearby village of Kopargaon, from which, after a wait of approximately three hours, they boarded a train to Manmad around 7 PM.

Noteworthy is the detail that they encountered "many visitors of Shirdi" at Kopargaon station, a circumstance that confirms Sai Baba's growing fame. Equally significant is the fact that Khaparde – who became stranded at Bhusawal while waiting for Palekar – had "not a single pie" remaining in his pockets, further attesting to the seriousness of his financial difficulties.

Khaparde and Baba Palekar finally reached Amravati around noon on 16 March. As Khaparde records in his diary, upon arriving home he spent time speaking with everyone about his stay in Shirdi, "the mode of life there and the spiritual greatness of Sayin Saheb who is constantly present to my mind".[449] In his diary entry of 17 March, he mentions the visit of Mr. Natekar, also known as "Hamsa", whom he describes as a holy man practicing yogic austerities and possessing extraordinary powers: "His experiences in Himalaya are unique and I never appear to tire of hearing about them".[450] Only several months later would Khaparde realize that "Hamsa" was in fact a British spy monitoring his activities and conversations.

It is significant that Khaparde was a member of the Theosophical Society[451] and, as already noted, served as president of the Theosophical Lodge of Amraoti from 1913 to 1922. Beginning in 1923, however, the lodge no longer appears in the lists of Indian lodges and was presumably dissolved. Khaparde's long tenure as president of the Theosophical Lodge of Amraoti clearly indicates that he shared the Society's ideal of universal brotherhood irrespective of race, creed, sex, caste, or color. In his diary entry of 17 March, he writes: "V.K. Kale and Karandikar came to go to our Theosophic lodge but having 'Hamsa' with me I did not go".[452] Given that Khaparde had contributed an article to *The Theosophist* as early as October 1880, when he was only twenty-six years old, it may safely be concluded that his commitment to the Theosophical Society remained constant throughout his life.[453]

449 *Shirdi Diary of the Hon'ble Mr. Ganesh Shrikrishna Khaparde, Advocate, Umraoti*, http://saiamrithadhara.com/docs/G.%20S.%20Khaparde%20Diary.pdf.pdf, 67.

450 *Shirdi Diary of the Hon'ble Mr. Ganesh Shrikrishna Khaparde, Advocate, Umraoti*, http://saiamrithadhara.com/docs/G.%20S.%20Khaparde%20Diary.pdf.pdf, 67.

451 By around 1910, the Theosophical Society had established approximately three hundred branches in India and, under the leadership of Annie Besant, came to play a significant political role. On the relationship between Theosophy – understood as an important component of the broader neo-Hindu movement – and the Indian National Congress, see Bevir, "Theosophy and the Indian Congress", 99-115. See also Rudbøg, Sand, *Imagining the East*.

452 *Shirdi Diary of the Hon'ble Mr. Ganesh Shrikrishna Khaparde, Advocate, Umraoti*, http://saiamrithadhara.com/docs/G.%20S.%20Khaparde%20Diary.pdf.pdf, 67. In 1912, Khaparde served as secretary of the Amraoti Lodge; see "General report of the anniversary and convention of the Theosophical Society 1912"; https://archive.org/details/GeneralReport1912/page/n291/mode/2up.

453 Apparently, Khaparde contributed no further articles to *The Theosophist*. The only article on Sai Baba published by the journal appeared in October 2018, marking the centenary of the saint's death; see Padhi, "Saint Sai of Shirdi and Theosophy", 10-14.

In his diary entry of 18 March, Khaparde expresses nostalgia for Shirdi and its spiritual atmosphere:

> The spiritual surroundings of Shirdi are not here and I find myself considerably inconvenienced though 'Hamsa' is under the roof and he has a good powerful aura. I wished to get up as I used to do at Shirdi but could not and it was with great effort that I could finish my prayers before sunrise.[454]

Interestingly, approximately two and a half months later, on 4 June, the diarist received a letter from Madhavrao Deshpande written at Sai Baba's request. The *faqīr* instructed Khaparde "to try and get Mr. Karkhanis to take his wife back and treat her well", adding that "she is a very fortunate woman and her presence will do him (= Karkhanis) and me good".[455] Apparently, this individual – whom both Khaparde and Sai Baba knew well – had repudiated his wife, and the saint wished him to reconcile with her in order to restore harmony within the family.

The following day, Khaparde replied both to Madhavrao Deshpande and to Sai Baba, explaining that Mr. Karkhanis was not presently in Amravati but assuring them that he would do his utmost to persuade him once he returned. On 10 June, Khaparde received a further message from Sai Baba, sent by Madhavrao Deshpande together with *udī*, requesting that he bring Mr. Karkhanis to Shirdi.[456] In his entry of 17 June, Khaparde records that Mr. Karkhanis had indeed come back and that he had shown him Madhavrao Deshpande's letter. Mr. Karkhanis, however, refused to change his mind, telling Khaparde that "he had great reverence for Sayin Maharaj and would obey him in every thing except the matter of his wife".[457] Upon hearing this, the diarist strongly urged him to travel to Shirdi and consult Sai Baba personally, but Mr. Karkhanis replied that "he would not do so now".[458] Finally, Khaparde asked him "daily [to] adore Sayin Maharaj", and "he agreed to do so".[459] On 18 June, Khaparde carefully records: "I wrote a letter to Madhavrao Deshpande of Shirdi giving full account of my interview with Karkhanis yesterday".[460]

This episode demonstrates Khaparde's prompt obedience to the commands of his master and his sincere efforts to persuade Mr. Karkhanis to comply with Sai Baba's wishes. It also confirms the diarist's profound faith in Sai Baba and his complete devotion to him.

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454 *Shirdi Diary of the Hon'ble Mr. Ganesh Shrikrishna Khaparde, Advocate, Umraoti*, http://saiamrithadhara.com/docs/G.%20S.%20Khaparde%20Diary.pdf.pdf, 68.

455 *Shirdi Diary of the Hon'ble Mr. Ganesh Shrikrishna Khaparde, Advocate, Umraoti*, http://saiamrithadhara.com/docs/G.%20S.%20Khaparde%20Diary.pdf.pdf, 69.

456 See National Archives of India, New Delhi, *Diaries of G.S. Khaparde*, 10 June 1912, Microfilm Repository, Identifier: MF_222400056291.

457 *Shirdi Diary of the Hon'ble Mr. Ganesh Shrikrishna Khaparde, Advocate, Umraoti*, http://saiamrithadhara.com/docs/G.%20S.%20Khaparde%20Diary.pdf.pdf, 70.

458 *Shirdi Diary of the Hon'ble Mr. Ganesh Shrikrishna Khaparde, Advocate, Umraoti*, http://saiamrithadhara.com/docs/G.%20S.%20Khaparde%20Diary.pdf.pdf, 70.

459 *Shirdi Diary of the Hon'ble Mr. Ganesh Shrikrishna Khaparde, Advocate, Umraoti*, http://saiamrithadhara.com/docs/G.%20S.%20Khaparde%20Diary.pdf.pdf, 70.

460 *Shirdi Diary of the Hon'ble Mr. Ganesh Shrikrishna Khaparde, Advocate, Umraoti*, http://saiamrithadhara.com/docs/G.%20S.%20Khaparde%20Diary.pdf.pdf, 70.

On 27 July, more than four months after his return from Shirdi, Khaparde recorded that one Mr. Nilkanth Rao Uddhavaji visited him at his residence together with Mr. Pandit and the latter's adopted son Bhaiya. During their conversation, Uddhavaji "was very much interested in my visit to and stay at Shirdi and the talk was naturally about Sayin Maharaj",[461] a remark demonstrating how constantly the saint remained present in Khaparde's thoughts and affections.[462]

A further indication of the continuing bond between Khaparde and the Shirdi circle is provided by Madhavrao Deshpande's visit to Amravati in August 1912. On 15 August, Khaparde recorded that Madhavrao had arrived at his house "by direction of Sayin Maharaj", adding: "He was very kind and I cannot be too grateful". Madhavrao remained his guest until 19 August, when he departed after receiving some presents from Khaparde. He intended to proceed to Nagpur before returning directly to Shirdi. The episode is particularly significant in that it shows that, even after Khaparde's prolonged stay in Shirdi had ended, his relationship with Sai Baba and the Shirdi circle remained active, with Madhavrao continuing to serve as an intermediary between the saint and the diarist.[463]

Khaparde's diary provides further evidence of the breadth of his religious interests during this period. On 28 November 1912, a Jagadguru Śaṅkarācārya arrived in Amravati, and over the following days Khaparde took an active part in arranging his stay, attended his public discourses – which he greatly appreciated – and held several conversations with him on 29 and 30 November and 1 and 2 December. The episode illustrates how, notwithstanding his profound attachment to Sai Baba, Khaparde continued to value close contact with other eminent religious figures.[464]

Overall, during his hundred days in Shirdi – that is, slightly more than fourteen weeks – Khaparde appears to have recorded a total of thirty-nine stories and sayings attributed to Sai Baba. For purposes of classification, each item is assigned below to a single principal category. The categories, however, are not interpretively exclusive:

a. Sixteen may be classified as parables or allegories (those of 6, 8, 12, 19, 21, 24, and 29 December; 4, 7, and 18 January; 3, 14, and 20 February; and 10, 12, and 13 March). Nine of these are also autobiographical in character (namely those of 6, 12, 19, 21, and 29 December; 14 February; and 10, 12, and 13 March), while two additionally illustrate Sai Baba's reputed *antarajñāna* (inner knowledge) – specifically the narratives of 21 December and 12 March;

461 *Shirdi Diary of the Hon'ble Mr. Ganesh Shrikrishna Khaparde, Advocate, Umraoti*, http://saiamrithadhara.com/docs/G.%20S.%20Khaparde%20Diary.pdf.pdf, 70.

462 Over time, Khaparde may, to some extent, have experienced what is known as *virahabhakti*, or "devotion in separation". In this form of *bhakti*, the devotee identifies with the intense longing experienced by Rādhā and the other cowherd women (*gopīs*) during their separation from Kṛṣṇa; see Hardy, *Viraha Bhakti*. Ultimately, the highest anguish caused by separation from one's beloved, known as *paramaviraha*, is regarded in the *Nāradabhaktisūtra*s (v. 82) as the supreme form of devotion. The agony experienced by the *bhakta*, who longs to be reunited with his Lord, is itself understood as a form of divine grace and as the expression of the purest love (*preman*).

463 See National Archives of India, New Delhi, *Diaries of G.S. Khaparde*, 15-19 August 1912, Microfilm Repository, Identifier: MF_222400056291.

464 See National Archives of India, New Delhi, *Diaries of G.S. Khaparde*, 28 November-2 December 1912, Microfilm Repository, Identifier: MF_222400056291.

b. Twelve are primarily autobiographical (those of 29 and 30 December; 1 and 18 January; 10, 14, 15, 23, and 26 February; and 6, 8, and 11 March, the latter consisting of an enigmatic self-referential utterance concerning Sai Baba's "mother and father"). At least one of these – namely the account of 1 January – appears to refer to one of the saint's previous lives, whereas the narrative of 6 March seems to describe either a nightmare or a visionary experience;
c. Seven are illustrative of Sai Baba's reputed *antarajñāna* (those dated 15 January, concerning Mr. Gupte, though no details are supplied; 25 January, concerning Mrs. Lakshmibai Kaulgi, again without further detail; 9, 13, and 29 February; and 3 and 9 March). Of these, three are also autobiographical – namely the accounts of 9 and 29 February and 3 March, the latter referring to one of the *faqīr*'s previous lives – while the narrative of 9 March concerns the previous lives of a pair of sparrows;
d. Two may be classified as riddles (those of 12 December and 28 February);
e. Two tales are mentioned but not recounted: on 18 January, Khaparde records that Sai Baba had apparently just begun telling a story when he was interrupted and did not continue it; on 20 February, Khaparde says that he cannot remember the tale.

To these thirty-nine stories and sayings of Sai Baba may be added the brief parable reported by Khaparde in his diary entry of 17 January 1911, in which he summarizes what the *faqīr* had narrated to Baba Palekar. This tale likewise possesses autobiographical significance, insofar as it appears to allude to the saint's continued presence in Shirdi throughout countless previous lives.